

Imagine an experience so profoundly moving that it changes the way you dream.

BY KIMBERLY A. HEMPHILL

DAVE BRODY, PRODUCER OF *INSIDE SPACE*, the Sci-Fi Channel's original weekly half-hour program about all things outer space-related, has had such an experience: Weightlessness. Brody flew on one of NASA's experimental flights in a specially outfitted DC9, "no seats, padded walls." He and his camera crew went up 72 times in one day and experienced 25 to 30 seconds of weightlessness each time. (Remember

those stories about the filming of the movie *Apollo 13*?) "It was a stressful experience, but great. Stressful, because to get weightless you have to endure double weight—two G's. It's like the world's largest roller coaster. You're falling 8,000 feet through the air. There's no up or down,

He dreamt he was in a huge gothic cathedral, and exploring it in three dimensions. "If there was a window or something way up at the top that I wanted to see, I just floated up there. Being weightless definitely changes your frame of reference." Dave Brody continued, "And guess what? You, yes, you, the Sci-Fi Channel viewer, will have a chance to experience this, too. Even as we speak, two companies are outfitting airplanes and working to get clearance to fly passengers into zero gee." Brody hopes that as soon as it's feasible, the Sci-Fi Channel will be able to offer a contest of some kind, with the grand prize being an astronaut-style weightless experience. So start getting into shape now—you must pass an Air Force third class medical exam before you're allowed up.

What else is happening at *Inside Space*?

"The Sci-Fi Channel wants our viewers to own Mars," says Brody. Sci-Fi will get a good start staking a claim when *Inside Space* covers NASA's Mars Pathfinder Project. This little robot, named Sojourner, (after abolitionist Sojourner Truth) will land on Mars on July 4th. On her six little wheels, she can rove a hundred meters or so. Brody explains, "She has a very sensitive 'nose'; she can determine by smell what's going on inside a rock, and she'll send the data back live. *Inside Space* will be there covering this story as it happens."

On March 9, 1997 the last total solar eclipse of the century will occur, and the Sci-Fi Channel will be on hand to cover the event. Lucky for us, because the eclipse will only be visible from Mongolia and Siberia. "We hope to be cooperating with Russian TV, and talking to a Russian cosmonaut. We want to have a special correspondent there, too, astrophysicist Fred Espenak, who writes for *Sky and Telescope*," says Brody. If all goes as planned, the Sci-Fi Channel will tie the world together for this event by making its coverage available to other networks, and by linking directly to planetariums and museums, where camera crews will be standing by to capture the comments and reactions of the public.

Asked to choose his favorite episode of the show so far, Dave Brody said,

"Rockin' Rocketeers." Host Geoff Fox and I went out to a dry lake bed in California to film an episode about people who launch large home-built rockets. They get special clearance from the FAA and local air traffic controllers to launch them. Some of these rockets go up

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If the Sci-Fi Channel has its way, someday you will own space.

no resistance. It feels like flying. It is flying." The experience really affected Brody (and, in a different way, one of his cameramen, who got sick). Even now when he does something as routine as picking up a coffee cup, he is aware of the pull of gravity. "You can't take it for granted after you've experienced weightlessness."

Logically enough, the episode chronicling this adventure, which will be shown in February, is entitled "Don't Take Gravity for Granted." *Inside Space* airs on the Sci-Fi Channel in the US on Thursdays at 7:30PM ET and 11:30 PM ET, Sundays at 9:30 AM ET, and Mondays through Thursdays at 8:30AM ET. In the UK, viewers can catch it Friday mornings at 08.00, Saturday mornings at 11.40 and Sunday evenings at 18.40.

And what about his dreams? Brody described a particularly vivid one he'd had a few weeks after the flights.

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The new *Battleground Earth* is Roddenberry's legacy, while George Lucas changes his *Star Wars* plans.

BY BOB MARTIN

BATTLEGROUND EARTH, a TV project first pitched by Gene Roddenberry in the mid-1970s, is being revived, in a partnership between the Tribune Entertainment (which produces *Hercules* and *Xena* for Universal) and Atlantis Communications. The project, under development by *Babylon 5* producers Doug Netter and John Copeland with the participation of Majel Barrett Roddenberry, is liable to put

bees in quite a few bonnets at Paramount, of course. There may be some ire at MGM as well, where plans to film L.Ron Hubbard's *Battlefield Earth* as a John Travolta vehicle are on the boards. (Then again, perhaps not. Retitling that one might help to downplay the Hubbard-Tra-

The honchos of Dreamworks have promised to supplement their roster of blockbusters with a mix of "edge" filmmakers, and they've made good on that promise in recent weeks by signing both Sal Stabile, writer-director of *Gravesend*, a grim childhood memoir, and Scott Hicks, director of this year's festival favorite *Shine*. Hicks has a first-look deal, which gives DreamWorks first dibs on whatever he comes up with; Stabile has a two-picture deal — his second feature will again be a gritty confrontation with his childhood specters, *Dance With Angels*, a story inspired by his father, a compulsive gambler.

Also at DreamWorks, Woody Allen has accepted the lead voice-role in *Bugs*, their computer-animated feature, as a malcontented ant, and another fantasy film has been added to their roster: *Paulie: A Parrot's Tale* concerns a young girl who is separated from her feathered friend, and their struggle to be reunited. The film will be narrated by the exceptionally articulate parrot.

Virus, from Chuck Pflar's comic book — published in 1993 and in development ever since — has finally gone before the cameras, with Mike Richardson (of Dark Horse comics and film fame) producing with Gale Anne Hurd (T2). Visual effects whiz John Bruno (T2, *True Lies*) makes his directorial debut.

In other Dark Horse news, Mark Verheiden, who helped create *Timecop* as a comic, and wrote the film's screenplay, is now shepherding the time-traveling lawman to the small screen. In the U.S., ABC has ordered 13 episodes for fall, 1997.

For the same season, ABC's parent company (that's Disney), is developing a one-hour show to be broadcast in the U.S. based on the film *Honey, I Shrunk The Kids*. Executive produced by John Landis, the show will feature the continuing misadventures of scientist Wayne Szalinski and his too-curious kids, with Wayne likely cooking up a "gadget of the week" for each outing. Says Landis, "I want to explore time travel and space travel. It's Irwin Allen meets *Little House on the Prairie*."

Steve Alten, the manager of a Florida meat processing plant, was laid off from his job a few weeks ago. Alten's not worried, though, because Disney just delivered the first payment in their half-million-dollar purchase of movie rights to Alten's unpublished novel; and Doubleday has signed the new author to a book deal worth \$2 million.

Alten's book, entitled *Meg*, concerns a specimen of an



You'll soon be crossing through the Stargate on television, as the Dean Devlin-Roland Emmerich film transforms into a weekly series.

volta-Scientology connection.) Another Trekker finding happiness outside of Paramount is Robert Wolfe, a producer on *Star Trek: Deep Space Nine*, who has placed his SF screenplay *Splinters* with 20th Century-Fox. The plot concerns a soldier of the next century in search of his missing wife.

Amistad (formerly titled *Mutiny*), the factual story of an uprising aboard a slave ship and its tragic aftermath, will be Steven Spielberg's next project following *The Last Word*, not *Saving Private Ryan*, as we've reported. *Amistad* is supposed to start principal photography in February, though the Tom Hanks war picture is still penciled in for a June start date. Apparently, Spielberg plans a very busy 1997, similar to his 1992-93 *Schindler's List/Jurassic Park* schedule.

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Casper Van Dien, James Morse, Dina Meyer and Seth Gilliam star in the film version of Robert Heinlein's *Starship Troopers*. The first peek of the giant alien insect enemies can be seen at left.

extinct species of shark, the gigantic *megalonodon carcharodon carcharias*, that resurfaces to terrorize the Philippines, Hawaii and coastal California. Since there's one of 'em, there's bound to be more, so Disney is of course planning a "super-jaws" franchise.

Disney has paid \$10 million for the movie rights to *Airframe*, Michael Crichton's forthcoming novel, and is talking to Barry Levinson about directing. Meanwhile, Levinson's film version of Crichton's *Sphere*, after a brief stall for re-writes and revised production design — paring the budget back from approximately \$100 million to \$85

million — is set to start shooting in the spring.

The Miracle Strain, a science fiction novel by unknown Brit writer Michael Cordy, made a \$700,000 prepublication sale to Disney's Touchstone Pictures, which expects John Hughes to produce. The story, set at the beginning of the millennium, concerns a scientist who is persuaded by a New Age cult to reproduce the genetic code of Jesus Christ.

Universal's *Face-Off*, starring John Travolta as a detective who penetrates the terrorist underground by surgically exchanging faces with a criminal genius, began

shooting in December, under the direction of John Woo. The film, which also stars Nicolas Cage, Robert Wisdom and Joan

Allen, represents a major departure for Gina Gershon (*Bound*, *Showgirls*) in her first major role as a heterosexual. Dominique Swain, star of the controversial new *Lolita*, will appear as Travolta's daughter.

On the website of his independent film company (<http://www.viewaskew.com>), Kevin Smith has been letting drop some seductive detail about the new *Superman* feature, which he recently rewrote; according to Smith, the original *Superman Reborn* script was fairly wretched, and Smith's overhaul was a thorough one. The

new title, at this writing, is *Superman Lives*. The gathering of other DC superheroes at Supes' funeral was nixed by the studio, because the presence of other heroes would require them to do something about the unpleasant events that quickly follow, but there will be loads of super-villains taking advantage of the Man of Steel's demise — Lex Luthor, Brainiac, the Cyborg, the Eradicator, the Legion of Doom, and probably a giant spider in the "third act." Though it's way too early for much talk about casting, Warners will likely go for big names (as in the star-studded *Batman* and *Robin*); Smith let it drop, rather casually, that he'd heard that Nicolas Cage has shown interest in playing Brainiac.

Smith also confided to fans that Universal Studios have asked Joss Whedon (*Toy Story*, *Alien 4*) to write a new *Six Million Dollar Man* script. Smith attributes Universal's dissatisfaction with his version to a management shift that also put executive producer Richard Dean Anderson out of the loop on the TV show revival.

Anderson will, however, appear in a continuing role in *Stargate SG-1*, based on the Dean Devlin-Roland Emmerich film. It will be MGM's third series for the Showtime cable network in the U.S., following *The Outer Limits* and *Pottergeist: The Legacy*.

Shooting has completed on *The Fallen*, the story of a cop in pursuit of Satan, with Denzel Washington in the lead role. Costars include John Goodman, Donald Sutherland and Embeth Davitz (*Schindler's List*). This is the first of four "go" projects about Satan to start shooting — making Satan even bigger than volcanos in '97. The others are *Devil's Advocate*, *Sid's Inferno*, and *Prophecy II*.

But then, the other side of the coin is well-represented as well; the recent films *Michael* and *The Preacher's Wife* brought angels to Earth. And God will be arriving in both *The Miracle Strain* and the latest blockbuster added to the roster of TriStar Pictures, *The Sky is Falling*. That one concerns two Christian ministers who uncover proof of God's existence while on an archaeological dig. The director of *Seven*, David Fincher, has been attached to the project since last year, but the old Tristar regime, spooked by the controversial script, and by Fincher's demand for final cut, had put the project in limbo. After last month's executive shakeup at the studio, Tristar's new president Robert Cooper retrieved the project from Tristar's dustbin.

Apparently part of the same millennial trend, *Meet Joe Black* will put Brad Pitt in a loose remake of the classic *Death Takes A Holiday*. Sixty years ago, the original starred Frederic March, as the mysterious Prince Sirki — a supernatural being whose task was to escort souls to the next world. That film concerned the troubles that ensued when the Prince, having consorted with mortals, developed a distaste for his job.

Variety finally confirmed our reports that Centropolis Films, the partnership of writer-



Godzilla will return to the big screen in Summer of 1998 at the hands of the Independence Day creators.

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Mark Verheiden, Timecop creator, will script further adventures for a time-travelling TV series.

producer Dean Devlin and writer-director Roland Emmerich, would do a page 1 rewrite of *Godzilla*, for a summer 1998 release by TriStar Pictures. In his "industry insider" column *Dish*, Michael Fleming also reported that art director Patrick Tatopoulos has completed the new *Godzilla* design (which tends to confirm previous report that preliminary designs were in the hands of the Trendmasters toy people).

A few new details: Devlin and Emmerich have yet to write the script, as approval from Toho for their new approach to *Godzilla* was slow in coming. "They were a little taken aback initially," Devlin says, "but then got excited. We really think we've found a way to bring the franchise back."

While Fox is officially silent about the budget for *Independence Day*, Devlin cited that film's budget as just under \$70 million. *Godzilla*, says Devlin, will be targeted to a \$90 million budget, saying that he and Emmerich are "dead set against these \$100 million budgets." Jan de Bont of *Twister* and *Speed* fame, walked away from the project when TriStar demanded the script be scaled down from a \$130 million budget; Tristar is already a bit nervous about their investment in *Starship Troopers*, with a budget at somewhere near \$110 million, so are reluctant to make a second huge wager on SF.

Devlin also dismissed the rumors — which you may have read about elsewhere, though not here — that a sequel to *Independence Day* was underway. "Our feeling is that while it makes perfect business sense to do it, there's no creative sense in Roland and I doing it unless it's just a great idea." Unlike their deal on *Stargate*, which MGM is now developing as a TV series without Centropolis input, Fox cannot proceed on an *ID* sequel without the partners' approval. Devlin and Emmerich are committed to Fox for a TV series of their own, entitled *The Visitor*, as well as the features *Supertanker* (an action thriller to star Bill Pullman), a remake of *Fantastic Voyage* and a historical drama of

the Alaskan gold rush entitled *Klondike*. Though not SF, both *Supertanker* and *Klondike* will include some major FX work. Both of these projects are based on existing original screenplays, though it's likely that the Centropolis partners will do some re-shaping of the material prior to shooting.

Rumors that George Lucas was planning to shoot all three new *Star Wars* films back-to-back have been confirmed by Lucasfilm, but Lucas has altered that plan; *Star Wars I*, planned to start shooting in late 1997, is now aimed for a 1999 release. Then preproduction will commence on the remaining two films for back-to-back shooting, most likely in 1999, or possibly early in the new millennium.

Twentieth Century Fox's big-budget *Fantastic Four*, a long-rumored project for *Home Alone* director Chris Columbus, is at last in active development. Some may remember the low-budget *FF*, made a few years ago, but never released; that picture was made solely to extend the producers' option on film rights until the Columbus project got underway. Unfortunately, no one bothered to tell the cast and crew that theirs was a bogus project, to be buried so the "big" version would reach an untapped market.

Though Maila Nurmi was once declared "an undiscovered Lauren Bacall" when she appeared in a quickly-closed Broadway play, her fame never grew above the cult level; in the early fifties, she had some national exposure as a "pin-up model," and later was well-known in Los Angeles as "Vampira," the TV horror hostess whose act was inspired Elvira, and who gained even greater fame as the "femme fatale" who, according to the gossip sheets of the times, lured James Dean into strange and occult practices. Ultimately, though, her greatest notoriety was as a minor player in *Plan 9 From Outer Space*, arguably the worst film ever made.

Vampira: About Sex, Death, and Taxes promises to clear up the alimony, and introduce the real Maila Nurmi to the world;

Continued on page 76

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There's no Earthly defense against the invasion of the invasion movies.

BY STEVEN PUCHALSKI

THE ALIENS ARE COMING!" Recently, that warning has taken on a newfound popularity, thanks to high-profile fare like Tim Burton's *Mars Attacks* and the record-shattering *Independence Day*, which has recently brought its wholesale destruction of mankind onto home video. But this theme has always been one of the staples of science fiction, from thought provoking classics like *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* and

the dime-store dementia of *Plan Nine from Outer Space*, to more recent television series such as *Dark Skies* and *V*.

In the wake of *ID4*'s publicity juggernaut, *The Arrival* (Live), the summer's other alien invasion film, seemed to get lost in the shuffle. Surprisingly clever, it deserved

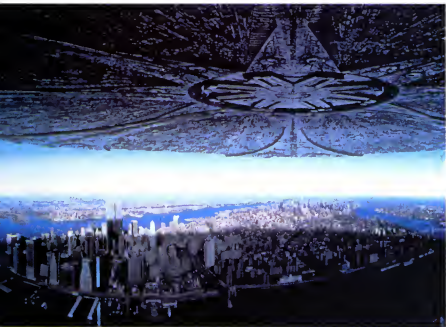
excitedly reports his findings to his superior, Ron Silver. To his surprise, he's suddenly fired, his tape of the signal disappears, and Sheen ends up blacklisted by the industry. That's only the beginning, of course, because while Sheen builds his own makeshift radio antenna in his attic and starts to crack under the pressure, everyone else with any knowledge of the signal is turning up D.O.A.

While in Mexico, Sheen joins up with Lindsay Crouse, who's investigating a sudden rise in global warming. Together they peel away layers of deception involving foreign-built power plants and the destruction of the earth as we know it. They also have to deal with such "accidents" as falling bathtubs, bedroom scorpions and accusations of murder.

If you can buy into the somewhat implausible premise, this is a terrific ride, and though the special effects are downplayed for much of the movie, they really kick in during the last half hour, when Sheen breaks into the alien HQ. Twohy has created a riveting thriller, full of beguiling plot twists.

Although most average moviegoers didn't know him until *Twister*, Bill Paxton has been a favorite with genre fans for years, after his steal-stealing roles in *Aliens* and *Near Dark*. But it was 1993's alien-on-the-loose thriller, *Monolith* (MCA Universal), which provided Paxton with one of his first top-billed gigs. Unfortunately, if *The Arrival* demonstrated how to do everything right with a simple sci-fi premise, this dud takes the opposite route. Despite an A-level supporting cast that includes John Hurt and Lou Gossett Jr., this seems interested in little more than logic-barren cheap thrills. It's no surprise that director John Eyres has remained in the straight-to-video niche, spending the following years cranking out his uneventful *Project: Shadowchaser* series.

The story begins intriguingly enough, when a female Russian scientist is arrested for gunning down a little boy, whom she claims was already dead. Paxton and Lindsay Frost play a pair of police detectives who bring her in, only to have the suspect taken away by government bigwig Hurt. Of course, even after they're been ordered off the case by their superior, Gossett, the stubborn pair continues their guerrilla investigation. This eventually leads them to an oth-



There was nothing subtle about the aliens in *Independence Day* (above), but the unwelcome visitors in John Carpenter's *They Live* took a more low key invasion approach.

a better fate, and is sure to find a second, longer life on video. On the surface, it sounds like any other hoary sci-fi premise. But director David Twohy (who previously scripted *The Fugitive* and *Waterworld*) sees this takeover of our planet within the framework of an action thriller. Instead of flying in and blowing up the place, these pesky invaders are infiltrating from within society, as we're offered a more intimate story of one man battling a global conspiracy.

Charlie Sheen stars as a radio astronomer who picks up a signal on his dish from light years away, and



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erworldly energy parasite, which uses humans as its host body, has glowing eyes and can shoot deadly fireballs. But this alien's citywide havoc is nothing compared to the chaos the snively Hurt and his stormtroopers create, ending in a half-baked climax inside an alien ship buried deep under the city streets.

Paxton and Frost have adequate chemistry together, but the limp script gives them little to do. And instead of developing a full-blooded character for Paxton, the film takes the cut-rate approach of slapping him with a predictable, family-related trauma (complete with the expected flash-backs). The only time this film picks up speed is when Paxton rips loose on his own — like when he has a private “interrogation” of a government slob, and nearly decapitates him with an elevator. Or when he becomes possessed by the alien force and goes on a killing spree. Still, these all-too-brief moments are little reward for suffering through the rest of this unimaginative fodder.

Moving on to more innovative fare, we have 1983's *Strange Invaders* (Vestron), a playful homage to '50s sci-fi, which fell through the cracks when first released. It even begins in 1958, with a prologue that takes us to an insignificant, rural town named Centerville — a place so cozy and peaceful that you can almost smell the apple pie cooling on the window sill. That is, until a huge UFO



After *Mars Attacks!*, don't forget to try out the schlocky 1950s *Invasion of the Saucer Men*.

appears overhead one night.

Cutting to the present, Paul LeMat stars as a New York City college professor, whose ex-wife (Diana Scarwid) returns to Centerville and leaves LeMat in care of their young daughter. But when the phone lines to the town go dead, LeMat heads there to investigate, and discovers that the place looks exactly as it did in the '50s, right down to the clothes, decor and even the slang used by the local teens. Of course, when LeMat's car is

blasted to pieces by an energy beam emanating from a bug-eyed creature, he realizes that the entire town is populated by creatures from another planet, who are trying to fit into typical American life, despite being a quarter century behind the times. And when they arrive in Manhattan to kidnap LeMat's daughter, these aliens look exactly like hick tourists as they stumble off the bus.

Along the way, LeMat also teams up with Nancy Allen as a tabloid reporter who writes fictional articles about UFOs and initially thinks the guy is a nut. There's also Louise Fletcher as a government rep, who admits U.S. authorities have always known about this alien takeover of the town, and Michael Lerner, who gets a few effective scenes as a mental patient who, years earlier, lost his family to these visitors.

Director Michael Laughlin keeps it briskly paced, with plenty of special effects involving the aliens — whether they're tearing off their human masks, shriveling their victims and turning them into floating spheres of energy, or spewing green blood when blasting in the chest. For additional amusement, the supporting cast is populated with faces from the sci-fi past, including Kenneth Tobey from the original *The Thing*, plus *Lost in Space*'s June Lockhart and Mark Goddard.

For a more pointed dose of science fiction, it doesn't get much better than John Carpenter's *They Live* (MCA Universal). Carpenter has always given genre fans plenty to cheer

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Jeffrey Parks.



In 1983's comic *Strange Invaders*, the confused aliens who pay us a visit still think it's the '50s.

about, and for this 1988 project, he put a unique spin on the aliens-are-coming theme by meshing it with a not-so-playful nudge at '80s consumerism, Yuppies and the Age of Reaganism. Roddy Piper took a break from his wrestling career to star, and although you might have some reservations about this casting decision, he's surprisingly appealing in the role. As a drifter named Nada, Piper plays the kind of loner who never gets involved — that is, until he runs into a shanty town of homeless families. It's here that Carpenter beautifully sets the tone for the entire film: showing us a world that's fallen on hard times, and where the poor have been forgotten by the wealthy. In other words, a world not so unlike our own.

Piper soon learns of an underground faction that's trying to expose a conspiracy involving hidden messages in society's advertising and television signals. And when this group is busted by the police, Piper ends up with a box of their seemingly ordinary sunglasses. Trying on a pair, he finally sees the world as it really is, with billboards, magazines and shop signs actually reading "Obey," "No Independent Thought" and "No Imagination." Even paper currency is encoded with "This is your God." More important, the glasses peel away the human disguises from aliens who have secretly infiltrated upper-crust society. And after blasting away at some of these secret invaders with a shotgun, Nada winds up on the run from the aliens and the police.

Like much great science fiction, this has a heartfelt social subtext at its core, and Carpenter isn't afraid to lay it on thick, with the homeless rousted from their shacks, a blind preacher beaten mercilessly by the police, and mankind selling out at the first whiff of quick cash. Carpenter also keeps the action fast and furious, for viewers more interested in the mayhem than the message. Despite a few directorial missteps (like a ridiculously protracted brawl between Piper and co-star

Keith David), this is a deliciously clever mix of science fiction and razor-edged satire.

Nowadays, Peter Jackson is considered a Hollywood player, with his arthouse hit *Heavenly Creatures* and the Michael J. Fox spook-fest *The Frighteners* under his directorial belt. But only a decade ago, he debuted with the low-budget sci-fi farce *Bad Taste* (Magnum). Jackson had a hand in every aspect of this New Zealand production — directing, scripting, editing, creating the special effects, and even taking a supporting role. The result is a riotously bloodthirsty chunk of sci-fi silliness, which never takes itself seriously and feels like it was slapped together by a bunch of good friends after they'd spent a weekend downing a trough of beer.

At first glance, it looks as if zombies have once again overrun the countryside, with the human race fighting for their lives. In truth, it's just another alien insurgency, this time with a plan to turn the human race into the galaxy's next fast food sensation. The only people who can save the earth from certain mastication are a ragtag band of guys, who plan to mow down this "planet of Charlie Mansons" in a flurry of goopy special effects. Of course, Jackson gives himself a juicy role, as the craziest of the humans, armed with a chainsaw. And when the invaders' homo sapien disguises are finally dropped, they turn out to be ugly, loping creatures, with huge bald heads and boney bare butts.

All in all, this is the Kiwi equivalent of a grue-strewn Road Runner cartoon — such as when one character falls off a cliff, lands 100 feet below on the jagged rocks, and still keeps going (albeit with a largish chunk of brain missing, and a mail-slot sized hole in the back of his head). Best of all, the film never loses its loopy momentum, and never fails to deliver clever (and always sick) kicks.

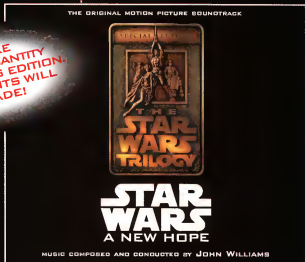
Finally, in the wake of so many recent, high-priced productions, we mustn't forget one of the earliest additions to the sub-genre, *Invasion of the Saucer Men* (Columbia). When

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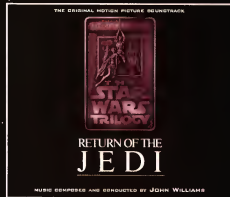
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The recent film *The Arrival* mirrors the public's fascination with conspiracies à la *The X-Files*.

it comes to '50s alien schlock, this American-International production is at the top. It runs through every imaginable B-movie cliché, packs in the (often unintentional) laughs, and features those unforgettable Paul Blaisdell-designed aliens — with their bulbous heads and half-pint height.

While out cruising for chicks in Smalltown U.S.A., a young Frank Gorshin spots a cheap plastic UFO landing in a field. Of course no one believes him. The government is busy covering up the truth, the sheriff thinks it's a prank, and the town's long-in-the-tooth teens are too busy smooching at *Lover's Lane* to notice. That is, except for one young couple (Steve Terrell and Gloria Castillo), who get a clue when they hit-and-run one of these extra-terrestrial midgits.

For additional weirdness, a detached alien claw has gone off on its own killing spree, complete with a rubber eyeball on the back

of it and fingernails that can inject alcohol into its victims. The fact that its victims appear to be drunk only makes the authorities more skeptical; and since any direct light sends the creatures up in a puff of smoke, any hard evidence is virtually impossible. And let's not forget the government subplot, because in typically half-assed fashion, the army dolts try to open the spaceship with welding torches and accidentally blow the thing up. Oops. So much for military intelligence.

If you're in search of hard science (or even basic logic), you can skip this flick. Instead, be prepared for misunderstood teens, goofy "little green men," and plenty of cheap thrills. Director Edward L. Cahn really had a knack for these cheesy monsteramas, and my only complaint is that our title creatures are glimpsed all too infrequently. If nothing else, this nostalgic drive-in swill proves you don't need millions of dollars to invade the earth. □

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The Frighteners: New Zealand writer-director Peter Jackson chose this as his first big studio debut after the cult success of such films as *Meet the Feebles* and *Dead Alive*. Now that you've seen Michael J. Fox blown to bits in *Mars Attacks!*, catch him as a ghostly con man in this dark comedy.

The Phantom: The classic costumed hero known as The Ghost Who Walks walked away with the box office in this *Indiana Jones*-flavored action romp. Starring Billy Zane as the immortal smasher of evil. Also featuring Treat (Mulholland Falls) Williams and Kristy (The Chase) Swanson.

Flesh Gordon: This spoof of sci-fi action serials was a college favorite as *Flesh* traveled to the mysterious planet Porno to save Earth from a devastating sex ray. This Deluxe Collectors Edition contains 10 minutes of previously unseen footage, and is available in both R and unrated versions.

Joe's Apartment: Jerry O'Connell takes a break from the *Sliders* to play a man who moves from Iowa to the Big Apple, only to discover that he's sharing his new digs with 50,000 singing, dancing cockroaches. Billy West, of *Ren and Stimpy* fame, provides the voice of the lead cockroach.

Tales from the Crypt: Bordello of Blood: Taking a break from the news desk of *Saturday Night Live*, Dennis Miller plays action hero in this tongue-in-cheek vampire romp inspired by the popular cable series which was itself inspired by a 1950s EC comic book. Also starring Angie Everheart.

The Island of Dr. Moreau: A century after it was written, this H. G. Wells tale still has the power to chill the blood. This time, Marlon Brando takes over as the mad scientist who wants to build men from beasts. Also starring Val Kilmer. Directed by John (The Manchurian Candidate) Frankenheimer.

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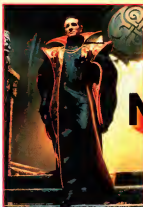
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Doctor Who



NEW



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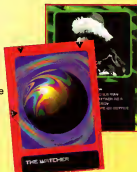
How about a Master? If your walls do not properly proclaim your fandom, then you need a serious *Who* makeover from 800-TREKKER. Choose either or both fantastic 24" x 36" shots. There's the Master (Eric Roberts) from the Fox televised movie and 7th Doctor (Sylvester McCoy) handing off his beloved TARDIS key to 8th Doctor (Paul McGann). A grand addition to any room in your house, office or personal time travel device. Order while there's still time.

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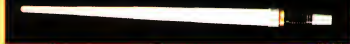
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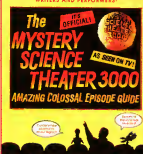
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WRITERS AND PERFORMERS



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A Gray Area

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"Did you see that...?"

It is a dark night deep in some unnamed woods when suddenly a light in the distance begins to burn with incredible intensity. Soundlessly it sweeps through the forest, always staying just out of clear sight range of its pursuers. That is the premise for the design on the back of this awesome shirt. Trust No One is over the front left chest.

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Boldly voyage onto the Internet to find the finest *Trek* and *Babylon 5* sites.

BY MELISSA J. PERENSON

FOR THE PAST SEVERAL ISSUES, Infinite Channels has talked about alternative ways of accessing the Internet, alternatives that make surfing the World Wide Web a viable and appealing option even for the technology-challenged. But what if you're already connected to the Web? What's the big deal, anyway, and where can you go once you're online?

Whether you're looking for an annotated version of the Ferengi Rules of Acquisition, a *Blakes 7* episode guide, or a partial copy of an early draft of *Star Trek Generations* (yes, it's still floating around), chances are it's out there on the Web. The challenge is in wading through the slush

enthusiasm for their favorite series. In the never-ending quest for information, "spoilers" — Net jargon for anything that might give away any details about something which has not already been shown on screen — are commonplace on the Internet. Fans can be incredibly resourceful: Last summer, when there were still no photos or details released about the eighth *Star Trek* film, the *Vidiot Star Trek: First Contact* page instead turned to digitized audio clips and still-video screen captures from a preview shown on *Entertainment Tonight*. And when the eagerly-awaited "Final Five" episodes of *Babylon 5*'s third season aired first in the United Kingdom, U.S. fans were able to learn all the details through extensive episode summaries and an assortment of video and audio clips that were promptly posted on-line; now, our episode-starved U.K. counterparts can similarly keep abreast of *B5*'s fourth season.

STAR TREK: Long before online was in vogue, *Star Trek* was carving a niche to call its own on the Internet. *Star Trek: The Next Generation* remains the most popular incarnation of *Trek*, and that popularity is reflected proportionately in the number of unauthorized and unofficial Web sites devoted to *Next Generation*, as compared with *Deep Space Nine*, *Voyager*, and the original series. The overwhelming number of choices is why Luca Sambucci, an Italian webmaster who maintains the popular *Star Trek* WWW (<http://www.vol.it/luca/startrek/>), created a site devoted to offering reviews of and links to *Star Trek* home pages. This must-visit site is far from a being a complete index, though.

"At the moment, there are over 600 home pages listed," says Sambucci. "And more than 50 additions every month."

Paramount Digital Entertainment is currently operating the only two official *Star Trek* outposts on the Web — *Star Trek: Continuum* (<http://www.startrek.msn.com>), which may only be accessed by subscribers of The Microsoft Network, and *Star Trek First Contact* (<http://firstcontact.msn.com>), which is tied in to the new *Trek* movie. Actually, there are three Paramount sites, if you count the general admission section of the Continuum, notable only for its downloadable QuickTime video previews of the next *Voyager* and *Deep Space Nine* episodes.



Sci-fi's superstars can be found spread across the Internet — including this very magazine, nestled within the Sci-Fi Channel's Dominion website (below).

— and it's out there, in volume — to find the things of value. Input the term "science fiction" into Alta Vista, and you'll get 226,128 matches. You'll forgive us for tooting our own horn, but your first stop on The Net should always be The Dominion, at www.scifi.com, the Sci-Fi Channel's own gateway to all science fiction on the web. The Orbit section contains hundreds of links to SF related sites.

Over the course of this column, we present our tour guide to some of the best sci-fi sites the Web has to offer, starting with two of the three most popular science fiction shows on television: *Star Trek* and *Babylon 5*. Cyberspace has become more than just a means for fans to express their



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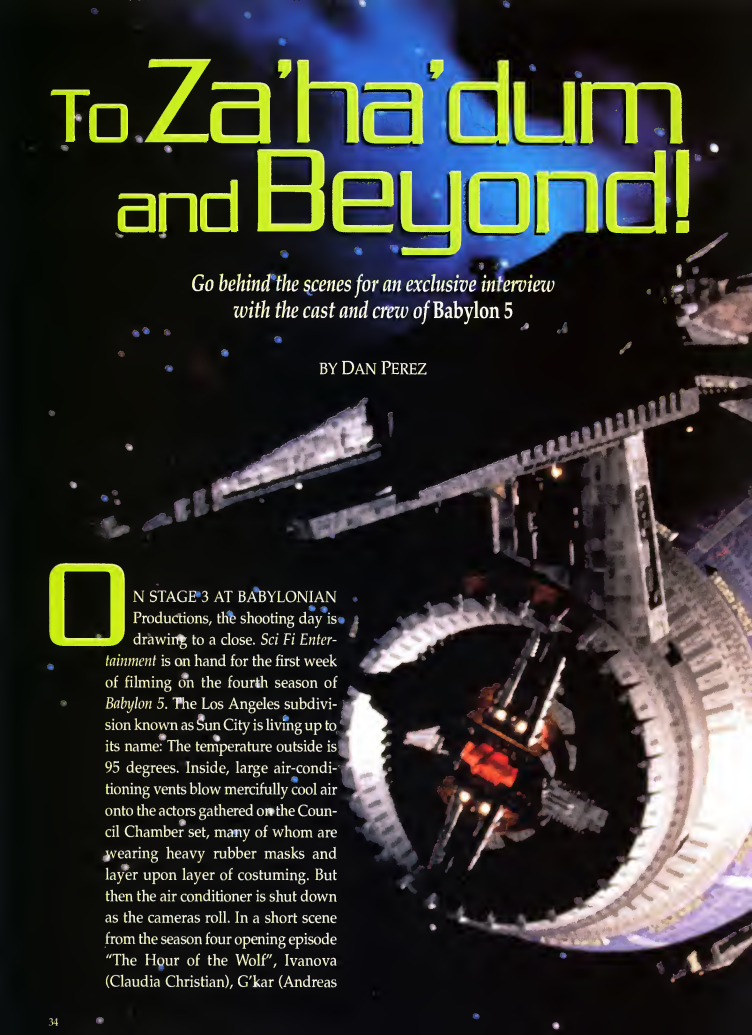
PADEMONIUM



To Za'ha'dum and Beyond!

*Go behind the scenes for an exclusive interview
with the cast and crew of Babylon 5*

BY DAN PEREZ



ON STAGE 3 AT BABYLONIAN Productions, the shooting day is drawing to a close. *Sci Fi Entertainment* is on hand for the first week of filming on the fourth season of *Babylon 5*. The Los Angeles subdivision known as Sun City is living up to its name: The temperature outside is 95 degrees. Inside, large air-conditioning vents blow mercifully cool air onto the actors gathered on the Council Chamber set, many of whom are wearing heavy rubber masks and layer upon layer of costuming. But then the air conditioner is shut down as the cameras roll. In a short scene from the season four opening episode "The Hour of the Wolf", Ivanova (Claudia Christian), G'kar (Andreas



Katsulas), Delenn (Mira Furlan), and Lennier (Bill Mumy) are arguing with members of the Council of Non-aligned Worlds. The actors hit their marks, deliver their lines, and the scene is concluded.

Afterward, a check with a sound technician reveals that the sound of a plane passing over the studio can be heard on the tape. The scene will have to be reshot. It's a difficulty the cast and crew of *Babylon 5* are used to, but it's surprising to an observer who has only ever been on standard Hollywood-style sound stages with built-in sound-proofing. And if there's one thing the Babylonian production facilities are not, it's standard Hollywood-style.

Babylon 5 is produced at what can



TOP: In the episode "Severed Dreams," starfuries from the Babylon station flank a huge destroyer in a battle sequence created by Emmy award winning computer effects firm Foundation Imaging. **INSET:** Minbari ambassador Deleenn (Mira Furlan) and the First One (Wayne Alexander) react to bad news in a scene from the fourth season episode "Falling Towards Apotheosis."

best be called a stealth production facility well removed from the cluster of studios in and around downtown Los Angeles. The three sound stages and set construction shop are located in two prefabricated warehouses that formerly housed other businesses (the signs for the other businesses still hang over the doors, lending to the stealth aspect). Few clues exist that might tip off someone driving past that one of television's best science fiction shows is happening nearby: a sign directing extras to park on the street and, on the gate of the B5 parking lot, a specially made "Sentient Crossing" safety sign decorated with clever illustrations of a Centauri, a Vorlon, and a Minbari.

The modest facility has helped keep costs down, and it has helped keep its ensemble cast insulated from big studio distractions. "That allows us a relaxation," notes Andreas Katsulas, who plays the Narn ambassador G'kar. "We don't have executives in suits down our throats, or coming in to peek, or sort of intimidating us or making an odd remark that someone takes wrong. Because all of that happens on a studio lot, or else you see somebody next door who's doing a thing, and word gets out that they're all getting paid six times more than you — all of these

intrigues and plots that go on when you know that there's 35 shows being done on the same lot. We're out there, isolated; we have everything we need, we don't have any pressures except the work itself. It's an extraordinary, unique situation to be in — very conducive to creativity." Series creator J. Michael Straczynski agrees. "It helps a great deal, because we have everything under one roof, now including CGI. It makes us far more efficient."

One trick is that some of the sets do double or triple duty as other sets, depending on which scenes are being filmed that week. The set for the Vorlon/Minbari warship *White Star*, for instance, is redressed so as to become the set for the Centauri Emperor's throne room. Certain sets, such as Medlab, the Zocalo, and the Observation Dome, remain static, although a single set of monitors and displays are moved from set to set as a cost-saving measure. There are only a few corridors and stairways. Changes in level are indicated by switching out colored plastic panels in corridors and colored tape on the handrails of the stairways.

One set stands out in particular, since it's not a Babylon Station set. Dirty rock walls form a semicircle around a hardscrabble of ashy ground and loose stone. Carved pillars in the rock walls give the impression of some sort of alien altar or ceremonial space. Willerth smiles and says, "I could tell you what set this is, but then I'd have to kill you." Later, producer John Copeland confirms what we're already pretty sure of. We've set foot on Za'hadum itself.

A few steps beyond, we're standing in Kosh's quarters, and another few steps puts us in the Docking Bay/Customs set. All the sets interlock into a warren of spaces and

corridors, making maximum use of the space available. It's a fascinating jumble, where one can admire the feminine touches in Delenn's quarters (a not-so-feminine pair of sneakers hangs permanently from a light boom just above the set), examine the silvery, futuristic (but still manually operated) orange juicer in Garibaldi's quarters and walk through a building on the surface of Centauri Prime, each within a few yards of the others.

One of the most cleverly designed sets at Babylonian Productions is the Zocalo. Each end of the tubular set narrows rapidly into a horn-shaped forced perspective setup that, with the aid of lighting and other effects (including progressively smaller furniture), gives the illusion of a comparatively huge, curved chamber. The crew quarters sets are dressed with all sorts of knick-knacks and curios which lend a lived-in atmosphere reflecting the personality of each character, often in considerable detail. For example, everyone recognizes the *Daffy Duck* tapestry over Garibaldi's bed, but on a countertop nearby is his father's police badge, as well.

Still, it can be a challenge to achieve a sophisticated on-screen look on a limited budget. "There's no easy answer," says Production Designer John Iacovelli. "The limited budget is a crutch, but, for example, our set decorator from last season is on *Titanic* with James Cameron right now. She complains about the budget and they have a hundred million dollars overall on that show. I think that's one of the battle cries: You never have enough budget. If you said, 'Do you have enough money?' I would say 'No'. If you said, 'Can you get the show done?' well, obviously yes.

"I think the difference in a TV show is that we have to compete in sci-fi fans' minds with what they're seeing in features, and we can't do every little joystick and control panel like in *Independence Day* or the upcoming *Starship Troopers*. Although when we do try to choose something and feature it in a way, I think the quality level is there. It's been a testimonial for our show that on almost every level of the show from the beginning that you can compare us to the *Trek* shows, and we have half the money."

One factor that began to grow more and more apparent



as we toured the *Babylon 5* studio and watched everyone work was that this is a happy set. This might have been explained away by the fact that it happened to be payday on the day we visited, but it's more pervasive than that. The cast and crew don't just talk about the show, they enthuse. "There is a generally happy atmosphere here," says Straczynski. "One of the things I'm proudest of is that the number one most common sound you hear in the hallways and offices is laughter."

"What we try to do with everyone," says Producer John Copeland, "whether they are a runner or one of the directors, is to invest them with a feeling that this is their show. It's no one person's show. My experience in filmmaking has always been a communal experience: People come together and make something that lasts longer than the sum total of the experience. Everyone's important."

Bruce Boxleitner, who plays Captain Sheridan, sums it up this way: "I think as with any business, it starts at the

TOP: Narn ambassador G'Kar is held prisoner by the Centauri. ABOVE: Director of photography John C. Flinn III (behind camera) prepares to film a scene with Patricia Tallman, Mira Furlan and Claudia Christian. LEFT: Clockwise from lower left: Jerry Doyle, Bruce Boxleitner, Claudia Christian, Richard Biggs, Mira Furlan, Bill Mumy, Patricia Tallman, Jason Carter, Andreas Katsulas, Peter Jurasik, Stephen Furst and Jeff Conaway.



top. We have a very good group of producers and directors, and I think the cast members all get along terrifically. There's no real sniping or fighting. And they have it down to a real system here. I think part of it is being here, being our own studio: It's like being on the station. We don't see any other people so it's a very well oiled machine."

"The fourth season of *Babylon 5* feels like a family now to me," says Peter Jurasik, who plays the Centauri ambassador Londo. "These people — you spend ten or twelve hours a day with them, and you develop real strong bonds. John Flinn, who runs the crew, he really is terrific. He was our [Director of Photography] on *Hill Street Blues*. He keeps it lighthearted, but he has a real strong, steady hand on the reins. He keeps the work rolling."

On stage three, there's a break in filming as a new shot is set up, and the actors relax. Cups of water are handed out to thirsty

The Man Beneath the Mask

A Talk with Jeffrey Willerth, Babylon 5's Kosh

He's the man behind one of *Babylon 5*'s most intriguing and enigmatic characters, and though his name appears in the closing credits for the show, he's not credited for playing the character. It's somehow fitting, though, since the character he plays is the mysterious Vorlon Ambassador Kosh.

Many viewers are convinced that Kosh, the alien enclosed in a beautifully abstract encounter suit, is a fully animatronic creation, but the truth is that Kosh is performed by mild-mannered producer's associate Jeffrey Willerth (Ardwight Chamberlain does the voice for Kosh, and is credited for the role in the show's closing credits).

One might expect Willerth to be unusually tall, but that's an optical illusion fostered by the high shoulders of the Kosh suit. In reality, Willerth is about six feet tall with sandy, reddish-brown hair, a slender build, bright eyes and a quick smile. Like the other cast and crew of *Babylon 5*, he's very upbeat and enthusiastic about the show. "The cast is so terrific," he says. "We get along really well. Friday night after we wrap, we get together. It's always been tight. Under these circum-

stances I think it's required. Our longevity here with our facility and our budget requires that. We're certainly not part of the studio system. I like that, too. I like being the underdog."

The Kosh encounter suit (sometimes referred to by cast members as "the jukebox") is a fiberglass helmet and upper body shell, both of which are packed

with electronics and mechanisms that operate the lights, the eye and other moving parts. "The whole suit is built on a harness, like a backpack, and it's all on top of that. It's got all kinds of electronics in there. Gizmos here and gizmos there. I operate the voice lights. Of course it's my voice when we record, but in postproduction, Ardwight [Chamber-

lain] does his job with the voice and that sort of thing."

Many fans think Kosh's gliding gait is the result of wearing roller skates. "No I don't be usin' no roller skates!" Willerth says in a jive accent. "The trick is, actually, as best as I can, is if you walk like you're walking a tightrope, foot to foot [heel to toe], look how far my weight transfer goes forward to back, as opposed to when left to right. So just by walking more in line, you look like you're just flowing right along. Now that gets a little tricky because the suit is so damned complicated. There's a plastic piece that hangs down the front."

The suit can be claustrophobic and difficult to work in, as well. "You cannot comprehend what it's like to spend that much time in such close proximity to yourself. I have an inch by an eighth of an inch [peephole] on either side of me and it points in a precarious place: it doesn't give me the right view — it just gives me an awkward view. I usually try to rehearse the scenes without the helmet to try to get a feel for how many steps I have to take or where I have to be. And then I definitely try to rehearse with the helmet. There are places I can see, so I use those as my



cast members. Andreas Katsulas and Claudia Christian play at shadow-boxing in a corner. Mira Furlan and Bill Mumy, still in their Minbari makeup and costumes, settle into director's chairs for an exclusive interview.

Sci Fi Entertainment: Mira, you were a big film star in the former Yugoslavia. What was that like?

Furlan: It was a wild kind of filmmaking: not regulated by rules — actors were not protected by unions, trailers were an incredible luxury, but you had the freedom to do many things that would be difficult here. For example, we had *time*... Time wasn't equal to money as it is here. You had time to experiment, you had time to do a take different kinds of ways, and so on. There's always something bad and something good.

Mumy: And much stronger coffee!

Furlan: Stronger coffee — that's right! (laughs) Although I was never a victim of that coffee and they teased me. I never drank Turkish coffee. I hated it. Everyone drank it

and they kind of despised you if you wanted milk in your coffee. You were a weakling. Everything is relative, as you know. Actors are always depressed and frustrated about something. It's always *something*. Either you shoot winter during summer and it's exteriors, or you shoot (which is even worse) summer during winter. But we have to overcome. That's our duty, and our task. We're dealing with it all. It's still great. It's still fun.

SFE: What's the most fun about what you do?

Furlan: The most fun is to act what Joe writes, I would say. It's also fun to be working with a cast like [this]. There are no huge ego trips. It's just a nice bunch of people.

Mumy: There are a lot of television shows, ensemble shows where people's egos get out of control, and they're miserable places to be. This is not one of those. But for me, I think the most fun is the free food. This is a great place to be. We're happy to be in Joe Straczynski's orchestra.

(Claudia Christian joins the interview.)

SFE: Claudia, how does it feel to be one of the most popular characters on the show?

Christian: Am I? Oh God! (she laughs) It's better than oral surgery. It's fantastic. I'm really quite thrilled to be a pawn in J. Michael Straczynski's chess game. It's the abuse factor. You get used to that after being here a while. I'm not worthy! I'm not worthy! No, I love it. I've got a great job.

Mumy: Why, Claudia is just our little brat.

Christian: Bigger off, darling! We were just discussing our least favorite terms, and every single article I read says, "Babylon 5's li'l brat! She's the class clown!" You know, Mira gets to be "the former Yugoslavia's Meryl Streep" and I'm the little brat (she laughs).

Mumy: I'm going to have to be the former Billy Mumy.

Christian: Former child star "Bone" Mumy, as they call him. The bonehead.

SFE: What has the recognition factor been like for all of you since you've been starring in the show?

Christian: My experience has been that it's very, very strong when I'm in England, when

references for where I need to be and where I need to go."

Willerth relies on cast and crew members for help with his cues. "A fine example of that was today," he says. "Pat Tallman and I were walking through the Zen Garden. Pat would hold my hand up until the second we needed to enter the chamber, and she'd give my hand a squeeze. A lot of times I'm like a bull in a china shop — I'll have one of the crew members waiting just off [camera] so I don't run into whatever."

Willerth took us on a tour of Kosh's quarters. The biggest surprise is how small the chamber is. It's about eight feet by twelve, or about the size of a roomy walk-in closet. "It gets very crowded in here," Willerth says. "We've got the camera, the crew and whatever cast members are in here, too." Just outside the room are large gleaming tanks of liquid nitrogen, which is pumped through pipes above the set to provide the billowing fog that serves as Kosh's native atmosphere. "It's nasty stuff," Willerth says, pointing at peeling paint on the concrete floor. "You can see here where it's burning the paint away. Sometimes when we're doing a scene I can hear drops of it hitting the suit. You don't want to get it on you."

The door to the chamber turns out to be a source of surprise, too. "Here's a bit of trivia for the fans," Willerth says. "Kosh doesn't fit through his own doorway. We have to carry the suit inside, and then I put it on."



When not wearing the Kosh suit, Willerth is a producer's associate for the show, working with producer John Copeland. "I'd been bugging John Copeland since I got here to work for him, because he's just a brilliant man and one of the current innovators in the industry. There just wasn't a place in the budget for me to do that. But the opportunity finally afforded itself: a producer's associate left the show to go back and do some schooling, and man, I jumped on that like a hawk and said, 'don't you know I'm the right man for this job — you know I've wanted this all this time. Don't even interview anyone else. Don't even give me your crap. I've got the job!' And he was like, 'well, I guess so.' And that's how it happened. It's been a little over three months now that I've been John's assistant, and it's tremendous opportunity for me. I'm learning something every day, and I couldn't ask for a better teacher."



I've been to Europe, when I go to the Renaissance fairs. When I'm out of Los Angeles it's very intense. [In L.A.] it's like, oh, Madonna. Blasé. I was recognized in Scotland. In Spain. And it wasn't just for my movie work — a lot

BELOW LEFT: The mysterious Vorlon Ambassador Kosh may hold the answer to the defeat of the Shadows. **INSET:** Associate Producer Jeffrey Willerth is the man behind the mask.

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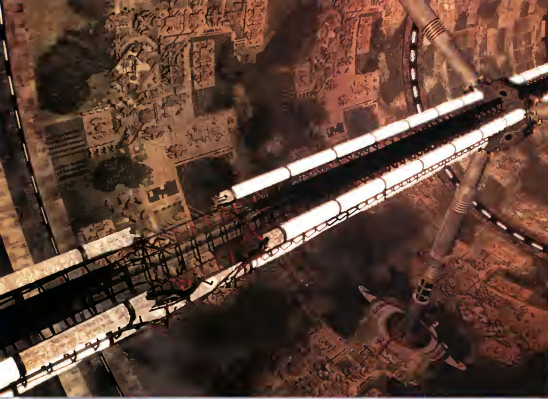
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ABOVE: The miracle of *Babylon 5* is that its special effects rival those of any high budget big screen adventure.

BELOW: Captain John Sheridan (Bruce Boxleitner) and telepath Lyta Alexander (Patricia Tallman) face imminent danger in "Falling Towards Apotheosis."



of it was *Babylon 5*. It's great. We're taking off.

Mummy: I never go out in public. Much too dangerous. (Furlan and Christian laugh)

Christian: Unless he's in full disguise, a la Michael Jackson.

Mummy: I wear dark glasses over my bone.

Furlan: It's much stronger in England. For me, this summer was really strange, because London is full of the refugees from my country. They all recognized me from my previous life, and *Babylon 5* fans were also there recognizing me. It was kind of like two lives coming together weirdly. It was actually very moving for me.

Mummy: We did [two] big conventions in England: one in Blackpool and one in London. Between those two cons I think like 6000 were there. It was really flattering.

Christian: We figure if they cancel us here, we'll just go over to England and [drawls in a southern accent] start us a new show! You know what I mean?

As the shooting day winds to a close, the caterers deliver foil trays of barbecue. Andreas Katsulas, still in his G'kar makeup and costume, devours a chicken leg and licks his fingers. "I just love barbecue sauce," he murmurs. As some elements of the set are rearranged, we had the opportunity to talk to John C. Flinn III, the Director of Photography, and David Eagle, Director of "The Hour of the Wolf."

SFE: How do you handle working with such a big ensemble cast?

Flinn: I'm used to it. I did a show called *Hill Street Blues*, where we had something like sixteen people. It's fun having a lot of people because it adds to your story. This is story A going on over here that has two or three or four people in it, and there's five

or six over here, and you've got the rest of them over there.

Eagle: Sometimes it's more of a challenge when a story revolves around a couple of people as opposed to most of the cast members, which gives you more to work with.

Flinn: Everything comes from the leadership, and what is rare here is that we have three producers. We have two executive producers, the creator of the show, Joe Straczynski, and Doug Netter. And we've got John Copeland ...

Eagle: ... as opposed to ten, like some other shows.

Flinn: And ten writers! They're trying to say "how about this and how about that?" and they've never been on the set. The nice thing here is that if we have a problem, if David sees something that doesn't jibe with him, he goes to Joe and Joe fixes it in a minute.

Eagle: It doesn't have to go through four different levels.

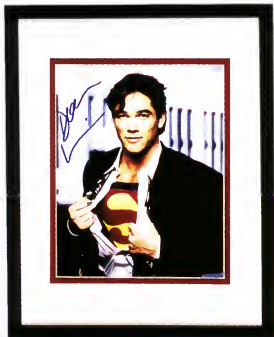
SFE: How does everyone keep their energy levels up after a tough day of shooting?

Eagle: As you can see, we're at the end of the day and the energy level is still pretty high. What's great about this cast is that they are such professionals and they care a lot about what they're doing. They keep that energy up and they keep that care and they give everything they've got right up to the end. They keep their costumes, their masks, their makeup on until they're ready to leave. The guy who plays Morden, Ed Wasser, was in the other day, and we did a scene with him where he's made up and he had a mask and a lot of stuff on him, and he didn't want to take it off. He wanted to go home with it on. They're an absolutely great group of people to work with. The guy who really makes things work on the set, as you've seen, is John Flinn, the Director of Photography. He's the energy and the spark behind everything that happens on the set.

Flinn: All we're doing, when you think about it, is working together and how can we make it better. It's teamwork. It's having people around you loving what they do. You can see it. You can see how everyone here is excited about what they do. If you can be here twelve hours a day for a week, and still laugh at the end of the day on Friday and sit around talking about what you did for a couple of hours, and you're off already, but you're still here: Why? 'Cause you had a great time and you're enjoying it.'" □

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*George Lucas uses
the force to make
the best even better
with a Star Wars
Special Edition*





Star Wars

TURNS 20

The Millennium Falcon (shown here evading an Imperial Cruiser) makes a return visit to your local theater—along with the rest of the Star Wars gang

A box of Cracker Jack that is all prizes.” — Pauline Kael on the original release of *Star Wars*.

Truth to tell, the impact of *Star Wars* in SF history was first noted with barely more than a footnote. In the 1977 edition of *The Visual Encyclopedia of Science Fiction*, there was a timeline of prominent past and upcoming SF films.

The final entry was an innocuous notice for an upcoming film to be called “*The Star Wars*, directed by George Lucas for Twentieth Century Fox, near completion.” This passing notice gave little hint of the coming of a Force that would change sci-fi filmmaking forever.

That, children, was 1977. By 1979, had the *Encyclopedia* been updated, editor Brian Ash might well have had to give it its own chapter. By 1996, *Star Wars* would be such a common reference that a recent *TV Guide* would take time out to jeer at TV shows that dared to riff on stock phrases from the movies.

The fact that three movies fast approaching their collective



20th anniversary was deemed worthy for reference by three unrelated shows should be held to be remarkable. It should be testimony to the fact that *Star Wars* has truly become an essential part of the 20th Century experience.

1997 and Beyond

"The beauty of marketing *Star Wars* is that everybody knows the story. All you have to do is let them know it's coming. It's not about selling a movie." — Tom Sherak, senior executive VP, Fox Filmed Entertainment.

What is more remarkable is that the birth of *Star Wars* as a 21st Century experience is already underway. There will be more *Star Wars* films starting in 1999, already in pre-production at LucasFilm as this is being written. As a commercial — and most certainly artistic — phenomenon, George Lucas and the awesome technical forces of LucasFilm are out to see that *Star Wars* continues to occupy a big place in the annals of entertainment. And the first salvo in this campaign will take place in the opening months of 1997, when *Star Wars Special Edition* — all three

movies — are successively released in three week intervals, displaying newly improved, newly updated, newly restored outtakes, in some places totally replaced scenes. *Star Wars* will once again make movie history.

Star Wars: A New Hope (the revised title of the movie originally released as *Star Wars*) will be released in the U.S. on January 31st, followed by *The Empire Strikes Back* on February 21st, and joined by *Return of the Jedi* on March 13th. All of these films are scheduled to "open wide" in Hollywood-speak — many theaters, many screens, many showings. In the states alone, it will be \$50 million worth of Media Event, with major advertising, tie-ins, merchandising, and giveaways down at your local Pizza Hut or Taco Bell or Kentucky Fried Chicken. PepsiCo, who owns all three and Frito-Lay as well, will be sponsoring the promotion.

Wouldn't it have been better to release *Special Edition* during the summer, or during the November-to-New Year's period, when blockbusters traditionally compete? At first it might seem to represent a lack of confidence in how well the films will do, but con-

sider the strength of the competition in the dead of winter — as in very little. Winter is considered "dead time" by the studios, when fewer people visit the theaters. So the studios dump films with little promotion and expect them to do less well. Against that competition *Star Wars* will unleash the power of the Force — plus twenty years of marketing savvy.

This seasonal trend does have an upside, since art or specialty-audience films benefit from the reduced competition for the moviegoer's entertainment dollars. Consider the case of Terry Gilliam's *12 Monkeys*, which was released in the U.S. with minor studio expectations in January 1995 and went on to be a gratifying hit for the quirky director. Clearly, the right blockbuster — or blockbusters — can command an audience of respectable size. Just what Lucasfilm wants.

Director's Cut

"I'm a perfectionist. I want my movie perfect forever." — George Lucas.

The release schedule, however, is clearly the

Darth Vader is still rebuffed when he offers Luke Skywalker a chance to rule the world at his side, but other plot elements have been enhanced. **RIGHT TOP:** The trilogy's climactic battle sequence will soon explode across the screen in an even more explosive version. **RIGHT BELOW:** Luke Skywalker confronts the Dark Side, and makes a startling discovery.



that existed in the original script but never made it to the screen. These films are in a striking sense new films; they do offer something to the fans that has never been seen before.

To put it simply in today's high tech language, this is Star Wars Release 2.0.

Two Decades Ago, in a Technology Far Far Away ...

"... There was a tremendous number of opticals just to make the practical effects work. Clever techniques like step printing and jump cutting — things we take for granted today because of the ease of digital painting and roto-scoping." — Tom Kennedy, Visual Effects Co-producer, ILM.

If George Lucas has anybody to blame that the movie-making technology he used in the original *Star Wars* movies looks a little shabby compared to the standards of 1997, it's himself. He's the one who organized Industrial Light & Magic back in 1975, in

order to supply the special effects he wanted for his proposed film, and he's the one who has continued to guide LucasFilm and its subsidiaries to pioneer in the fields of computer graphics imaging (CGI) and digital technology.

Consider the state of the art as seen in the 1977 release of *Star Wars*. The big breakthrough was motion control, a computerized system which allowed cameras, props, and models to be programmed to move in precise, repeatable patterns. This revolutionized the look of spaceships and other objects, allowing many separately photographed elements to be synchronized and composited into a single shot. From the breath-taking beginning as the giant Star Destroyer looms over Tatooine to the swooping and banking of X-wings and Tie Fighters over the Death Star, motion control provided the most exciting space battles yet filmed.

Other effects were more conventionally obtained. The optical printer — which transfers elements from multiple film strips to a



case of a good bet being hedged. It's true that the first installment of the *Special Edition* is twenty years old, and the next two are seventeen and fourteen respectively. In addition, they were enormous hits for each of their respective first releases (and *Star Wars* has only recently been nudged from a place near the top of all-time box office winners), have had two major video releases (the second with updated THX sound), one special laser-disc release (in letter box format), not to mention selling literally millions of books, tapes, comic books, and video games. That alone should prove that people are still interested in the movies, even if there were no new surprises.

But there are. In fact, the *Special Edition* will be "the director's cut" to end all director's cuts — with a striking difference. All previous director's cuts have merely involved footage or outtakes made during the original filming, restored to the "official" print, such as *Spartacus* or *The Abyss*, to name two.

In the *Special Edition*, there are numerous effects redone with cutting edge digital technology, background plates that never appeared in the originals, second unit scenes



Mos Eisley (ABOVE) has been transformed from sleepy village to bustling city by ILM's special effects wizards. OPPOSITE TOP: Lando Calrissian has an uneasy—and temporary—alliance with Darth Vader and bountyhunter Boba Fett. OPPOSITE BELOW: Princess Leia (Carrie Fisher) is held captive by Jabba the Hutt, who will now make an appearance one film earlier in *A New Hope*.

single strip of film — was used extensively, in everything from putting the light into lightsabers to showing the Millennium Falcon escaping from a Death Star docking bay. Blue screen photography allowed spaceships and actors filmed against a blue or green screen to become foreground elements, optically composited onto a background plate, allowing new and unearthly situations to be dramatized.

Some effects were as old as the history of movies, or even the tradition of stage magic. The undercarriage of Luke's landspeeder was hidden behind mirrors which reflected the desert sands, making the speeder appear to float above the ground.

Other innovations were just coming into their own.

Radio-controlled servo motors were used to animate characters like R2D2 (Kenny Baker ended up "animating" quite a few of those from within when the notoriously difficult motors refused to work!), not to mention such mundane details as pantyhose pulled down over a camera lens in order to simulate heat

haze over distant dunes! "Traditional" hand-puppetry, not to mention model-work, extensive makeup for some characters, and matte painting for city backgrounds filled out many of the other requirements for the world-vision that George Lucas was looking for. Nearly eighty years of filmmaking — from the Melies brothers to George Pal and Ray Harryhausen, to Stanley Kubrick's 2001: *A Space Odyssey* — had generated time-tested techniques of visual fakery; it wasn't their fault that Lucas wanted more.

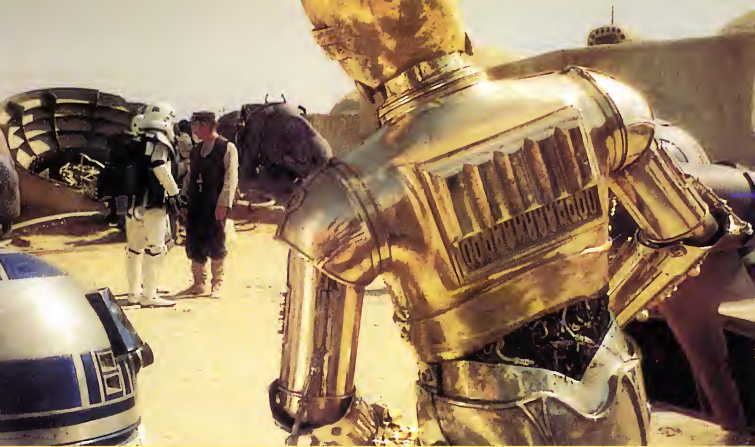
The Digital Age

"It's a virtual director's cut. [...] It's interesting that ILM was created to do *Star Wars* and after all these amazing pictures the company has worked on, the new technology that's being developed is being folded right back into the original picture." — TyRuben Ellingson, *Star Wars: A New Hope* visual effects art director.

Three little letters make all the difference in the films of today: CGI. Using powerful com-

puters and state-of-the-art 3D animation software, it is possible to create totally synthetic backgrounds, sets, characters, or combinations thereof, nearly as good looking as real ones. It's expensive, but if money is no object, a director can literally illustrate what only lives in his or her mind's eye.

Not only has LucasFilm and ILM been in the forefront of CGI development, they have further developed and sold off patents and processes such as Pixar, and the Avid technology that makes it possible to digitally edit film directly on a computer workstation instead of in an editing bay cutting the film



strips by hand. In addition, Skywalker Sound has pioneered parallel developments in movie sound, such as the THX process used on most films today.

The special boxed set of the trilogy sold in 1995 featured updated THX sound, but the *Special* will change far more than that. About \$10 million has been spent on *Star Wars: A New Hope* alone, though a large chunk of money was invested in refurbishing badly damaged portions of the original negative.

The 1977 film was shot on several different film stocks, not all of which have aged, well despite being kept in climate-controlled Kansas bunkers. It was necessary to go back to the interpositive struck in 1985 for a few sections, as well as the separation masters, and even the Technicolor print owned personally by Lucas. The result is said to be truer, deeper colors and images than have been seen since the premiere.

Not as much work was needed for *Empire* or *Return*, both because

those were done on better stock in the wake of the first film's great financial success, but also because the illusive techniques of 1981 and 1984 had advanced significantly — witness the stop-motion effects such as the Imperial Forces' All Terrain walkers in the second film. All in all, more than 250 visual effects in all three movies will have been updated, in addition to added scenes.

New Scenes, New Looks

"There were a lot of new things that we were able to put in there that make the shots much more exciting and much more sophisticated."

— George Lucas.

Planning for the re-release started in 1995, with the 20th anniversary just two years away, and new films just four years away. To prepare the modern audience for the new, it was necessary to bring the old films up to modern standards. After extensive discussions, storyboarding, negative restoration, and blue sky brainstorming, the scenes added or updated to the trilogy range from replacements for second-unit work that didn't work as well as they could the first time, to an outtake that had to be dropped because the technology of 1977 just didn't allow it.

■ In *A New Hope*, there are revamped second unit scenes of the Imperial Storm troopers searching the desert sands for R2D2 and C3PO, incorporating new footage shot at Yuma, Arizona, with the original footage shot in Tunisia. A CG Imperial landing craft buzzes over the dunes while a storm trooper rides past on a lumbering, lizard-like dewback, also animated via CG. In the original, a mechanical dewback failed to work properly, and was photographed more or less static with a storm trooper astride it. In addition, footage at the Mos Eisley spaceport was tweaked to include more dewbacks, and Jawas riding a rondo (another huge lumbering beast partly based on the brontosaurus from *Jurassic Park*), which rears up when startled by a passing landspeeder.

■ Mos Eisley has grown. The Omnimax film *Special Effects* shows ILM artists recreating models of the city that allow it to be bigger and dirtier — and most of all *more busy* — than before, as costumed extras will be added to the scene that Luke's craft speeds through. The extras were all recruited from ILM's friends and family members, by the





Additional Imperial Storm Troopers join the search for R2D2 and C3PO in the revised *A New Hope*. **OPPOSITE, INSET:** The Imperial Walkers that stride across Hoth have been restored to pristine condition thanks to George Lucas demanding standards.

way, so this is something of a valentine to the folks back home!

■ Luke's speeder received some attention as well. Watch for the CG used to hide the edges of the mirror beneath it better, and soften the animated shadow it throws on the ground as it hurtles along.

■ Also in the first film, a blot on the character of Han Solo will *literally* be erased — in the Cantina scene, Greedo will shoot first, through the courtesy of some CGI resequencing. It has always bothered some fans that in the original Han seems too quick on the draw, the threat that Greedo represented not being well enough established, and the action rather muddy. Now, with a wider shot showing Greedo's first shot ricocheting around Han, the smuggler's return fire won't seem so bloodthirsty.

■ The added — really, *restored* — scene that will get the most attention from the fans is a meeting between Solo and Jabba the

Hutt. Originally filmed with Harrison Ford and an extra standing in for a stop-motion character to be added later, it was dropped because of artistic and budgetary reasons. After all, Lucas didn't know for sure that the sequels would ever get made, and if he had to cut somewhere, this was it — he didn't even have a firm idea at that time what Jabba would look like, such as another large furry creature not unlike Chewbacca. Now in 1996, CGI was used to "construct" a Jabba that matched the foam-rubber animatronic character of *Return*, and to animate him so that Solo will have to step over his twitching tail in the scene.

■ The final battle sequence in the first movie, The Battle of Yavin, will also be improved — up to thirty more rebel fighters, and a wider composition for the screen, with CGI replacing or adding to the motion control models used in the original film.

Explosions which were photographed via traveling mattes and blue screen have now been digitally enhanced and sharpened.

■ In *The Empire Strikes Back*, Lando Calrissian's Cloud City will get a facelift, as the Millennium Falcon is guided in for a landing among fantastic spires by the "cloud cars," once again courtesy of CGI. The CG artists had to be reminded to make the city a bit more grungy and realistic, not the stylistic perfection available in the digital domain. Now the viewer will get a guided tour

Star Wares

A galaxy far, far away spawned a multi-billion dollar merchandising empire.



among the towers instead of a few short establishing shots.

■ Also in *Empire*, the lair of the Ice Wampa where Luke must fight for his life will become more detailed, showing viewers a bit more why this yeti-like creature is to be avoided at all costs.

■ Added details in Jabba's palace in *The Return of the Jedi* will feature more creatures and more dancing than before.

According to Lucas, budgetary and time constraints made this sequence less than he wanted it to be. Look for the Palace to be considerably expanded, more populated — and especially look for one dancer's sequence of moves, where 13-year-old footage seamlessly blends into movements filmed in 1996. They got the same dancer, still in shape, back for that.

■ Finally, the fireworks at the end of *Return* will be spiffed up, as the heavens themselves rejoice at the defeat of the Dark Side of the Force, and celebrations are depicted on a number of different planets; planets perhaps to be featured in future *Star Wars* films.

21st Century Star Wars

"*Star Wars* is the mother of all sci-fi movies." — Tom Sherak.

If the marketing genius of George Lucas is correct — and it would seem it hardly

ever isn't — the *Special Edition* will be a roaring financial success. It's probable that the number of people who haven't seen even one installment of the trilogy must be very small indeed. Given that the 1995 special boxed set sold 22 million copies, it would seem that *Star Wars* has thoroughly penetrated the market. But the rerelease of the spiffed up trilogy will allow a generation — it has been thirteen years since the last wide theatrical release of the movies — to correct the injustice that they have not seen the films in their best venue, the movie house: in the dark, on a big screen, with big sound, the way God and George Lucas intended them.

For the young fans, who have probably only seen the story on a little screen, it will be a revelation. For their elders, who thrilled long ago in a decade far, far away, it may truly recapture the special experience of the cinema. The characters and the story, as much a part of the magic as any or all special effects, will largely remain unchanged, but there will be new eye candy to amuse the most jaded palate.

In 1977, the projected *The Star Wars* rated only a mention in the Visual Sci-Fi encyclopedia. The 1997 release of *Star Wars Special Edition* will rate more than an asterisk in the movie record books. They say that you can't remake a classic, but as George Lucas knows, when you use the Force, anything is possible. □

From Franklin Mint collectible statuettes and printed bed sheets and comforters to 15 million books featuring Luke & Leia & Co. sold in bookstores and newsstands and supermarkets, the business side of *Star Wars* couldn't be healthier — and LucasFilm aims to keep it that way. The marketing side of the trilogy is as immense and powerful — if a bit more benign — than the *Empire* itself.

The truth, according to *Forbes* magazine, is that \$3 billion worth of licensed merchandise has been sold since 1977.

That is in addition to the total \$1.5 billion gross for movie tickets in the same period. And that doesn't take into account profits from LucasFilm's other artistic works, such as the mega-successful *Indiana Jones* movies and TV series. The president of LucasFilm, Gordon Radley, guesstimated that Lucasfilm may in total be worth \$5 billion.

Lucasfilm comprises more than the justly renowned Industrial Light & Magic, which not only hires out to other studios in need of digital magic, but does one-quarter of its business work for advertising firms. In addition to Skywalker Sound, there is LucasArts Entertainment, handling computer and video games that have made serious entries in their respective markets. LucasArts grosses more than \$100 million a year on its own.

Star Wars Special Edition is not expected by experienced media watchers such as *Variety* to become huge blockbuster hits of 1997, but it is predicted to do "mildly" well: *A New Hope* may gross \$25 to \$50 million, and parts II and III of the saga each about half that.

Compare this to the original grosses of \$323 million for *Star Wars*, \$223 million for *The Empire Strikes Back*, and \$264 million for *Return of the Jedi*, all in their original runs.

Now, those were blockbusters. But for a refurbishment cost of around \$15 million (broken down approximately as 10/2.5/2.5 between the three movies), a gross of \$100 million or more works out pretty well.

The genius of George Lucas is more than the ability to make good movies — although that is certainly enough to call anyone a genius — he has also proven again and again that he is a good organizer and marketer. And that will serve him

in good stead now, when he must prepare an audience twenty years later for a set of movies that will build on his earlier creation. By refurbishing the originals, he builds excitement, instilling in a new generation a fondness for the concepts and characters. When the first of the new *Star Wars* films premieres in 1999, the memory of excitement in the dark of the movie house will still be recent in the hearts and minds of fans of all ages. □



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The Cover: George Lucas celebrates the 20th Anniversary of Star Wars by re-releasing the sci-fi classic. Pictured are Han Solo (Harrison Ford), Darth Vader (David Prowse), C-3PO (Anthony Daniels) and Luke Skywalker (Mark Hamill)

STAR CONTACT

The Borg are back, bigger and better—and badder—than ever. **RIGHT:** Riker (Jonathan Frakes) warp inventor Zefram Cochrane (James Cromwell) and LaForge (LeVar Burton) risk all to stop the Borg's plan to prevent First Contact. **OPPOSITE:** Geordi appears without his vision-enhancing VISOR eyepiece.



Seasons may come and go, but the cast of *Star Trek: The Next Generation* has proved that it is indeed possible to go home again. It's been two years since the crew of the starship Enterprise ended its television voyages and made the leap to the big screen in *Star Trek: Generations*. Now, under the direction of colleague Jonathan Frakes, the crew has reunited for *Star Trek: First Contact*, and it's like nothing has changed.

"It was great to be working with everybody again," says Marina Sirtis, who plays the empathic Counselor Deanna Troi. "We're really good friends, and see each other anyway. But the fact that we were on the set together — that's

basically a license to have fun. We picked up where we left off. The characters are there; they're like our alter egos now. Once they appear in the mirror during make-up that first morning, and you get that space suit on, it's over. They're there."

The old sense of comradeship that *The Next Generation* crew was known for remained fully intact. "We laughed," states Michael Dorn, the actor behind the imposing Klingon, Lt. Commander Worf. "We laughed more than worked. In fact, when Jonathan [Frakes] says, 'Okay, let's rehearse,' that means let's act up. Brent [Spiner] starts singing or I jump on Patrick [Stewart], or whatever. It was a really wonderful experience."

For the actors, *First Contact* proved to be a very different experience from *Generations*. "It was weird," recalls Dorn. "We had a wrap party [for *Next Generation*] and said our goodbyes and boo-hoood, and then we're back working together again."



"*Generations* actually just seemed like an extension of the series," adds Sirtis, "because I only got three days off between finishing the series and starting on the movie. It just seemed like it was another episode that was just going to take a bit longer to shoot."

First Contact distinguishes itself from the outset with an action-packed plot that seamlessly embraces the human element that's at the core of *Star Trek*. "In this film, the Borg go back into the past and blow up this missile

*Make First Contact
with the cast and
crew of The Next
Generation's
long-awaited big-
screen debut*

BY MELISSA J. PERENSON



base, and as a result time is not going to proceed the way it was supposed to," explains producer and co-writer Rick Berman. "So that gives our guys a license to change things and put things back on the course that they were supposed to be on."

Pre-production was already well under way when Berman selected the film's director. And the choice was, in many ways, a logical one. "There had obviously been discussions about a director for a long time," recalls Patrick Stewart, who portrays Captain Jean-Luc Picard. "The conversation focused on what we really needed: somebody who knows this world, who understands it. At that point, for me, there was no question as to who it should be. Jonathan is an authentic director."

His feature film directing debut successfully completed, Frakes acknowledges that the experience was: "Thrilling. Daunting. Overwhelming. Exhausting." He laughs. "Ultimately, it was a great gift that I thank Rick Berman for trusting me with. It's a fabulous script, so my job was not to screw it up."

There were obvious advantages to working with someone who was so familiar with the cast. "We worked in shorthand because of the almost decade that we've spent together," says Frakes. His voice takes on a humorous tone that borders on the verge of laughter. "I mean, there's just total lack of respect for each other," he jokes goodnaturedly, "and it provides an atmosphere that is so delightful to work in; just an utter disregard and anything goes [environment]. And that is an atmosphere that I think people can be more creative in. They're not scared, and they feel that they can try anything they want to try. By taking those chances, you often end up with magical moments that weren't in the script."

It also helped that Frakes, who's directed episodes of all three *Star Trek* series, had an established working relationship with Berman. "My relationship with Jonathan,

which has existed over nine years now, changed less than you might think," says Berman. "I was a little bit more hands-on than most producers are, because that's my responsibility in terms of this franchise. And in some of the areas, especially in post-production, where I have a great deal of experience, and Jonathan has a bit less, we worked quite closely together. But while he was on the stage and directing, I let him be a great deal, and that's exactly the relationship we have when he's doing television work for us."



But there are differences inherent in directing *Star Trek*, the television show, and *Star Trek*, the movie. "You had more time to prepare, and you could use bigger toys," laughs Frakes. "You can visualize more elaborate shots and they don't say 'Frakes, are you crazy? We can't do this.' It was a thrill to be able to have the shots that you envisioned

actually carried out."

As the director, Frakes worked closely with production designer Herman Zimmerman, costume designer Deborah Everton, and makeup supervisor Michael Westmore. "One of the things that changed significantly was the look of the Borg Queen," recalls Frakes. "When we finally found Alice Krige after reading about a hundred actresses, she was the only one who nailed it. But Alice was so sexy and so passionate in her audition that it seemed a shame to do what originally had been planned, which was to Borg her the way we had the drones. We decided we'd just feature her face and then pull that Borg stuff out of the back of her head. She was a great find for us, and I think she's fabulous in the movie."

Elaborates Berman, "The Borg have never worked too well alone. They're a collective race, they're very scary, but they tend not to have voice, because they have one single, collective voice. We needed someone to personify the Borg, someone that we could really relate to. And because there was this hive-like quality about them, the thought of a queen, like a queen bee, seemed to be the way to go."

If there's any complaint about *First Contact*, it would be in the uneven distribution of screen activity (witness the example of Gates McFadden's Dr. Beverly Crusher). But, as Frakes acknowledges, "It's hard for all seven of us to have good parts in these movies, because it's just the nature of the beast. I think Riker fared quite well, all things considered. Patrick and Brent carry the burden of the story, but I was actually thrilled to be in that

bar scene with Marina and Jamey [Cromwell, who plays warp drive inventor Zefram Cochrane] where [Marina] is just magical. I'm so glad they finally wrote to Marina's comedic strength. She was wonderful."

"One of the scenes that's my favorite in the film is the two-hander with Alfre [Woodard] and Patrick, the Ahab scene," offers Frakes.



"She and Patrick are arguably two of our finest actors working, so to get in a room with these two masters, with a pretty damned well-written scene, all you have to do is capture the moments. It's not interesting camera work, it's just masters and overs and a couple of pushes, but you have to allow them the space and the atmosphere to go as high as Patrick, who gets very high in that scene, he does. We had two days to shoot that scene, which was a luxury, and we rehearsed a lot, because that's the peak of the movie."

The most challenging scene to film, though, was the battle sequence on the ship's hull. "The set was circular, so there are no geographical landmarks to recognize where everybody is. All three of the heroes are wearing the same white space suit costumes, so you can't tell who's who from a distance, and you can't tell where they are on the set from a distance. You have to go in really close to see that it's either Worf or Picard or Hawk, and then once you get in a tight close-up, you've defeated the purpose of being on the outside of the ship, which is to have that majesty."

Frakes' directing efforts met with universal kudos from the cast and crew, which roundly described the set as being happy and relaxed. "I love working with Jonathan as a director. He creates a really wonderful atmosphere in which creative things can happen," observes LeVar Burton, who plays Lt. Commander Geordi La Forge. "I share that philosophy."

"For me," adds Stewart, "it was one of the

happiest experiences I'd ever had. The responsibilities that go with directing a movie like this are *awesome*. This man took to this experience. The best indicator of the quality of work that he was doing is that in the movie, Jonathan gives the most relaxed performance of Riker that I've ever seen him give. He's so laid back and humorous and charming and cool all the way through the movie. And this was the guy who was carrying the responsibility for all of it. Big thing for him to do. The studio put a lot of trust in him, Rick did as well, and he just flew with it."

While *First Contact* was in the early stages of development, Stewart actively participated in shaping his character. "Right after *Generations*, within ten minutes of the screening, I was saying I don't want to see this happen in the next movie," recalls Stewart. "I knew early on just what I wanted to get from Picard in this movie. One thing that I knew for certain was that I wanted him in the trenches, I wanted him in the front line. I'm very grateful that they permit me to be that involved in the development of these stories. Everything you saw in *First Contact* was there by intention, and was a very strong reaction to *Generations*." And after screening *First Contact*, Stewart says, "I was already listing the things that I wished we'd had in this movie, and I damn well want to make certain are going to be in the next one."

For example, Stewart continues, "I think it's time that Picard lightened up a little bit.

Jean-Luc Picard (Patrick Stewart) comes face to face with the Borg Queen (Alicia Krige).

OPPOSITE TOP: Jonathan Frakes, having directed numerous television episodes, is behind the lens for the first time on a big screen production. Here, he advises Michael Dorn on his next scene. OPPOSITE BELOW: Alfie Woodard as Lily Sloane joins ST:TNG series regulars Data (Brent Spiner), Dr. Beverly Crusher (Gates McFadden) and Picard in a gathering that felt more like a family reunion than a movie set.

He's so intense so much of the time. I think that to develop the ironic side of Picard would be really nice.

"I honestly feel now that I no longer know where Patrick Stewart leaves off and Jean-Luc Picard begins," Stewart admits. "I really know who he is. It's a little unnerving, actually. There was a moment when I was watching *First Contact* when I looked at it and thought, That's me, that's not Jean-Luc Picard reacting in that way. That's Patrick." These curious things happen in this way, and they're encouraged by the fact that, all around us here are my good buddies, whom I adore and respect. The complexities of these relationships just go on growing, and so, when Dorn and I stand toe-to-toe, eyeball to eyeball in that scene, where he says, 'If you

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*A stellar cast discusses the filming
of Mars Attacks!*

The Stars Attack!

BY GEOFFREY MANN





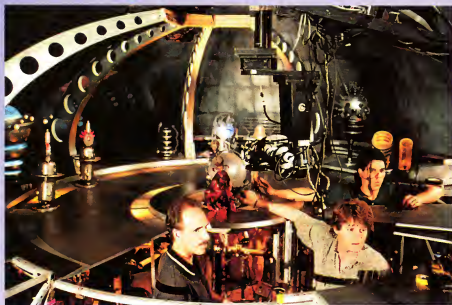
MARS ATTACKS!, DIRECTOR Tim Burton's valentine to the alien invasion movies of the '50s and '60s, recently began its own full-scale invasion. However, instead of conquering the planet, the film only has Earth's theater box offices as its goal. The omens are good. *Mars Attacks!* contains all the prerequisites for a sci-fi blockbuster success story — such as ray-gun toting aliens, breathtaking battle sequences, heroes, villains, explosions and dazzling special effects. But it has one ingredient that

many sci-fi features lack, in that this time the action is brought to life by an all-star cast that includes some of the biggest names in Hollywood.

Topping the credits of the highest profile group of luminaries ever to appear to an SF movie is Jack Nicholson, who creates the dual roles of the President of the United States and Las Vegas businessman Art Land. Joining him are Rod Steiger, Glenn Close, Annette Bening, Jim Brown, Pierce Brosnan, Paul Winfield, Martin Short, Danny DeVito, Sarah Jessica Parker, Lucas Haas, Michael J. Fox, Pam Grier, Lisa Marie, Sylvia Sydney, and Tom

ABOVE: The Martian space fleet surrounds our planet in a scene straight from our 1950s paranoid sci-fi nightmares — but with better special effects. LEFT: First Lady Marsha Dale (Glenn Close) is awestruck by her first contact experience.





TOP: ILM's special effects wizards manipulate a miniaturized Martian. ABOVE: Jack Nicholson is over-the-top in his role as Las Vegas businessman Art Land, one of two roles he portrays in the film. ABOVE RIGHT: These alien visitors have none of the gentleness of E.T. in them, as their antics prove. BELOW RIGHT: Annette Bening welcomed the chance to work professionally with husband Jack Nicholson for the first time.

Jones, the last of whom sings his signature theme song to let us know of a Martian invasion that "It's Not Unusual."

Mars Attacks! is only the latest in a long line of genre films that have been touched by Jack Nicholson, one of whose first few films included Roger Corman's 1962 cult classic *Little Shop of Horrors*. As the most prestigious actor of the group, Nicholson took charge of morale. "He just ran the show," said screenwriter Jonathan Gems. "It's more of a theatrical tradition than a movie tradition, but I think it used to be a movie tradition. Most movie stars are really rather selfish and they don't care about the rest of the cast. They don't take their responsibilities as a leading man seriously. But he did."

"It was great," said producer Larry Franco. "He was having a lot of fun on the movie. He and Tim really get along great so it was a pleasure."

Another high profile actor is Michael J. Fox, currently receiving raves for his work on the new comedy *Spin City*.



"I play a character named Jason Stone," said Fox in a recent interview. "A reporter for the Global News Network — GNN — which is meant to be similar to a large news network you might be familiar with. He is assigned to come out and cover the Martian landing. It's really the biggest story of his career, which still makes it a distant second to his favorite thing in the world, which is





himself. He's very vain, his hair is very important to him, and he lives with a young woman who is a fashion reporter who seems to be scooping him on this whole Martian thing. He's not too happy with it. He doesn't understand why she's getting all the big interviews. It's kind of fun to play a character that's supposed to report on what's happening, and really is more concerned with himself and his hair.

"I think in this whole parade of familiar faces and familiar actors, I believe I'm the first one to get completely blown away. I don't last long. It's really exciting, and I think it'll be a great sequence. I've heard Tim describe it several times, and there's nothing like having Tim Burton really gleefully describe your demise to you to really make your day. It's like — 'Oh, it'll be great, you'll run along and you're blown up and your arm will fly off.'"

One actor who is more at ease blowing up others than getting blown up himself is Pierce Brosnan, who stepped into the role of James Bond in *Goldeneye*.

"The President is worried about how to greet the Martian Ambassador," said Brosnan recently. "I play Professor Donald Kessler, this guy who's a know it all British scientist into Martianoology. And basically, he hasn't got a clue what's going on. He

thinks they come in peace. He thinks this is the new Renaissance. And he advises the president that all is well. And the president says, 'This is good. I'll wear my blue Cerutti suit. I'll go out there and I'll greet them.' And of course they land and blow up everybody."

Brosnan is unstinting in praise for the rest of his coworkers, particularly Nicholson. "His energy and presence on the set is big. He is one of our greatest actors and performers. Whatever he touches turns to gold."

One character looking to make gold out of the Martian invasion is the rude gambler played by Danny DeVito, of *Taxi* fame. "You know, some people call me rude," said DeVito of his character. "I kind of think I'm a nice guy. I'm just a guy who wants to gamble. I go to Vegas, I want to have a good time, and all this brouhaha is happening. I mean, what is this? Somebody's got news that Martians have landed somewhere. What is that? I want to play craps. I want to have some fun, have a couple of drinks, play some blackjack, see a show. Everybody's all tuned to this baloney that's going on on the TV. I mean, so what? They blew up the White House. Big deal! I mean, let's have some fun. Green men running around with ray guns. I mean, get 'em out of there! It's distracting. Come on! I enjoyed it. I thought it was really great to play this part.

"I'm a lawyer. That's the only thing that I'm kind of on the fence about in the movie. I didn't want to get killed, but I am a lawyer, and they all should be shot. No — I'm only kidding. That was a joke. That was a joke! I've got a lot of friends who are lawyers. It's a joke, it really was."

One actress not as well-known for her jokes is Glenn Close, who puts a spin on her image by playing the obsessive-compulsive First Lady. But the change was welcome for this actress known primarily for her dramatic roles. "That's why I was so thrilled, because people don't usually think of me for things like this, so it was great to be asked to be in it, and to be able to be funny — hopefully. [I] don't get offered comedy that often, but we'll see. Maybe I'll owe Tim a whole new career."

Close warns that her role as First Lady Marsha Dale should not be construed as making a political comment on any particular First Lady. "No, she's a combination of several. She's very anal and uptight. Very protective of the president. She worships him. I think she's always redecorating, and can't wait to get her hands on certain rooms to whip them into shape. Very aware of appearances. I don't want to have the Martians in the White House, and I certainly

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Inside the Sci-Fi Fu

The Sci-Fi Channel becomes the exclusive home of Mystery Science Theater 3000's outrageous brand of comedy.

By MELISSA J. PERENSON



Ever sit through a movie that was so bad, it was funny? So funny that the only way to make it though the movie was to start talking back to the screen, laughing at the movie instead of with it? That's the idea behind *Mystery Science Theater 3000*. Well, most of the idea, anyway.

MST3K began life back in 1988 with truly humble beginnings on KTMA, a small Minnesota TV station. "Kevin Murphy and I were working at KTMA," recalls producer Jim Mallon, who also plays the voice of Gypsy, one of the

show's resident robots. "I was the production manager, and he was our director of photography. We were using the gear in the studio on weekends and nights to play around with concepts and ideas. I approached a local stand-up



nhouse



comedian by the name of Joel Robinson and asked him if he had any ideas. About two weeks later, we had lunch, and he shared an idea he'd had where, instead of having a hosted movie where the host appears at the commercial breaks, wouldn't it be fun to have a host through the movie as you're watching the movie? We worked for about four weeks to come

up with a pilot, which aired, and we did ultimately twenty two shows on KTMA, and sold the show to [U.S. cable network] HBO as they were just starting The Comedy Channel, which eventually evolved into Comedy Central."

Mystery Science Theater 3000 has always had a unique, campy quality, thanks to its low-budget sets and skewed sense of humor. Although it helps to know the background story,



No one laughs harder at sci-fi's funny failures such as Mole People (far left) and Leech Woman (above) than the cast of MST3K (center): Gypsy, Crow T. Robot, Mike Nelson and Tom Servo.

you can still follow along with the show easily enough. In the past, the premise has been that the twisted mad scientist Dr. Forrester is conducting an evil experiment by subjecting a human male to viewing the most awful movies imaginable while trapped in the Satellite of Love, a space station orbiting Earth. His first subject, Joel, managed to escape, so Forrester replaced him with Mike Nelson, a genial fellow who, like Joel, manages to tolerate the movies with the only recourse he knows: humor. While watching the full-length feature, Mike and his mechanical friends, Crow T. Robot and Tom Servo, ad lib along with the movie. And already, the silhouetted trio has become a part of our pop culture.

The robots have a down-to-earth, home-made feel to them, notes writer Bill Corbett, who operates Crow. "They're not incredibly sophisticated little machines. I think Crow is slightly more complex than the other guy, Servo, because people seem to be able to make Servo's pretty easily if they can find a gun ball machine."

"We reached the end of our last season with Comedy Central, making our last shows in December of last year, and

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"Watching TV, if you're presented with something really goofy, your reaction is to scream back at the set."



Comedy Central had about a two-month window where they could decide to buy more," says Mallon. "Ultimately, they chose not to, so that, at the end of February, we were figuring out where we should go."

Mallon took matters into his own hands when Comedy Central decided not to exercise their option to renew the series last February. "It was so obvious to us that the Sci-Fi Channel would be a perfect home. I just picked up the phone and called Barry Schulman [vice president of programming at the Sci-Fi Channel] directly, and I introduced myself. I asked if he knew the show, and he said 'oh yes, he did. In fact,'" laughs Mallon, "he claims that Sci-Fi was already getting credit for running our show because people just equated it with the Sci-Fi Channel, even though it wasn't on the network. So I mentioned we're free and clear of Comedy Cen-

tral, and we're looking for a home, and that began a series of negotiations."

Four months later, a three-year deal was in place with an up-front commitment for thirteen episodes, and work started on new shows in August 1996. Comedy Central will continue to run episodes until the end of January, after which you'll only be able to see *MST3K* in new episodes on the Sci-Fi Channel.

So, just how does a movie get the honor of being selected as fodder for an *MST3K* experience? "When we first started with Comedy Central, we went through any source books that we could find on goofy, sci-fi, monster, horror films. We would put together a big wish-list of titles, and send that to the network. Also, the network had buyers that were looking for packages [of movies] for HBO and Comedy Central, and whenever they saw a really goofy package, they'd throw the cassettes our way."

Now that *MST3K* is going to be on the Sci-Fi Channel, the process will become a bit more streamlined. "Sci-Fi has a lot of silly sci-fi movies that are already in its library," explains Mallon, "so it's one-stop shopping. There also are a better quality of bad movies, which is a pretty funny statement, but what it really means is that the movies have good production values, they're focused, they have a semblance of a plot, and the camera is roughly pointed at the action. Based on a lot of movies we've seen, that's not always the case."

Science-fiction films, by their nature, lend themselves to the *MST3K* experience. Notes Mike Nelson, who is the head writer of *MST3K*, in addition to playing the unlucky subject of Dr. Forrester's experiments, "Science fiction films always work well, because sci-fi tends to take itself so seriously or make such big pronouncements, and when those misfire, they're pretty funny, as I'm sure anyone who appreciates sci-fi knows. It helps to have movies that are at least somewhat watchable on their own."



ABOVE LEFT: Mike Nelson plays a space prisoner forced to watch those sci-fi flicks that are so bad they're good, along with metallic companions Tom Servo and Crow T. Robot. BELOW LEFT: The MST3K cast will soon take revenge on *Revenge of the Creature*. RIGHT: Series creator Jim Mallon operates *Gypsy*, the third of the series' robotic cast.

Unfortunately, mum's the word on what will be different about the story of *MST3K* in the new episodes. "There are many dramatic changes, but I can't tell you," Mallon says apologetically, under strict orders from the Sci-Fi Channel to keep that information under wraps until the first new episode airs.

What we do know is that Trace Beaulieu, who's been with the show since its inception as both a writer and the voice behind the robot Crow, has left the series to pursue other projects. Replacing Beaulieu is Corbett, whom Nelson pulled in as a writer during the show's sixth season.

Crow will essentially remain the same, although Corbett's Crow will have his differences. "I'm originally from New York, so he may have an occasional bit of Brooklyn accent," he laughs. "I don't want to wind up doing a bad impression of Crow, so the voice will definitely be different, but hopefully he will still have that kind of wise-ass quality that people seem to love about Crow. The only slightly nerve-wracking part is that Trace really had a handle on this character and invented him. My first time trying the puppet made me realize how much Trace was behind the life of Crow. I've been having a complete blast, but only when I don't put the onus on myself to try and be just as good from the get-go, because he was terrific."

The premiere episode will set the stage for the new plot, now that Dr. Forrester is out of the picture as was established in the final episode of *Mystery Science Theater 3000* on Comedy Central. The first episode will revolve around the movie *Revenge of the Creature*; other movies on deck for the season are *Mole People*, *Leech Woman*, *The Thing That Couldn't Die*, *The Land Unknown*, and *Deadly Mantis*.

"You just sit down with a movie with about six writers, and we take our shots at the film," explains Nelson of the writing process. "One of us is typing, and we just take everything that's fit to print. We do that twice through with each movie, and that takes us about six hours per viewing. Then we assign the lines to the different characters and refine the script after that. But the bulk of the writing is done in those two days. You get to just sit in a chair and hurl out comments."

It's not all fun and games, though. "You have to have a high threshold of pain," says Nelson, "because these movies are pretty hard to watch. We all have, for some reason, absorbed a lot of this useless information about TV and film and things, and so it helps to have that frame of reference. A quick wit is important too."



Offers relative-newcomer Corbett, "What I always admired about the show was the wide range of references they were able to pull from pop culture. When I started writing on the show, I guess I didn't realize how hard it was. It's not simply a matter of throwing random insults; there has to be enough variation, and it has to be fit into the movie so you can actually follow the movie's plot."

Mallon considers a number of factors as contributing to *MST3K*'s popularity. "First and foremost, I hope it's just plain funny. I think because we're kind of all over the map with what we reference in our show comedically—from TV shows we watched as kids to Latin courses we took in college—we're sort of referencing an enormous database of references relevant to baby boomers and Gen-Xers with life experiences. Because there are so many jokes, we can write specific jokes that don't have huge audiences, and, in that sense, we can be very personal for someone.

Also, this show is really accessible because, frankly, we don't hold the technical bar very high; you can see how we've made the props and the sets and the robots. There's no high-end, supercomputer cranking out numbers; it's just a bowling pin hot-glued to a stick."

For the first time, the series will gain exposure outside of the U.S. on USA Networks' international channel Sci-Fi Europe. But is *MST3K*'s unique blend of pop culture-based humor going to translate well outside of the United States? "That's a good question," says Mallon. "I think it will do OK. If you think of when *Monty Python* came here, they had a lot of House of Commons references and jokes and stuff that I know nothing about, but most of the show seems to work fine, even if I lose a few jokes. Certainly in any English speaking country we should do all right. Although, I think the French would probably be confused as heck about our show. It will be really exciting to see what happens." □

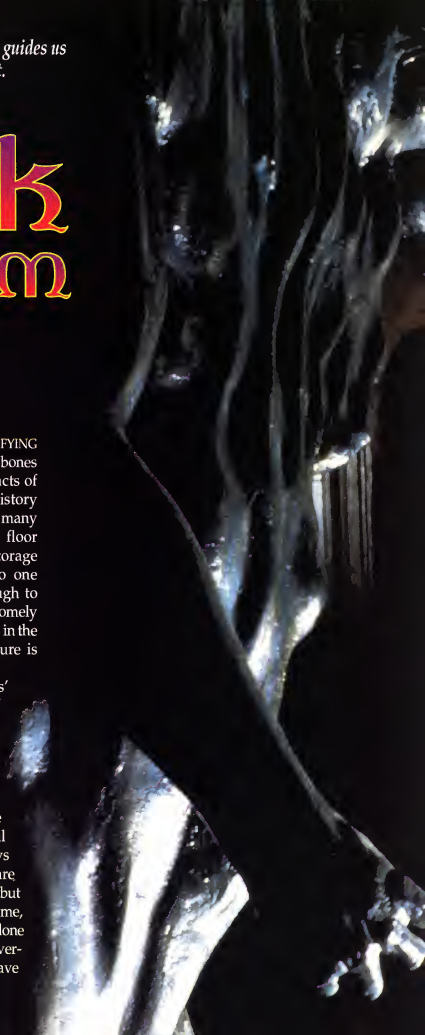
Director-cinematographer Peter Hyams guides us
to this season's scariest exhibit.

Dark Museum

BY LISA MACCARILLO

SOMETHING TERRIFYING lurks among the bones and dusty artifacts of the Natural History Museum. It has many places to hide; floor upon floor of storage space where no one ever goes, but anyone unlucky enough to chance upon it will quickly and gruesomely discover that, unlike the other creatures in the museum's vast collection, this creature is fiercely, intelligently alive.

The premise of Paramount Pictures' dark thriller *The Relic* is reminiscent of the golden age of studio screamers, the kind of movie that helped shape the life of the film's director and cinematographer, Peter Hyams. "I remember most vividly, as I think a number of other people do, those times at the movie theater when the emotional impact of the film is so strong," says Hyams. "There are loud films; there are startling films; there are gruesome films; but there's very rarely a film that's scary. To me, seeing *Alien*, seeing *The Exorcist*, sitting alone in a movie theater — those were such overpowering experiences. So, when you have



*Evolutionary biologist
Margo Green (played by
Penelope Ann Miller)
discovers the supernatural
beneath the Natural
History Museum.*





Something deadly (ABOVE) is delivered along with a Chicago museum's latest exhibit. RIGHT: Actress Penelope Ann Miller dealt with the challenge of Director Peter Hyams to expose her innermost fears. FAR RIGHT: That the horrific Kothoga is a creature drawn from South American mythology is of little interest to a museum guard whose only cure is survival.

an opportunity to make a film that has that potential, you take the risk and you do it."

Peter Hyams, whose career has been highlighted by such innovative films as the 2001 follow-up, *2010* (which Hyams photographed, produced, and directed), *Capricorn One*, and *Outland*, as well as the recent action films *Sudden Death*, *Timecop*, and *Narrow Margin*, had never done a horror movie. With veteran producer Gale Anne Hurd (*Tremors*, *Terminator 2*) and peerless creature creator Stan Winston already attached to *The Relic*, Hyams knew that the right opportunity had come. "The pedigree of the film is just magnificent—Stan Winston, Gale Anne Hurd, that meant to me that there was a commitment on the part of Paramount to make a quality motion picture because it doesn't just take money," he says, "you need that caliber of person behind it."

"One of the most interesting aspects of the film is finding out really what a museum is," says Hyams, who spent many hours during his own childhood haunting New York's Museum of Natural History.

"It's fascinating what goes on behind the scenes, the politics involved, the scholarship involved, all these weird things that have a very dark and gothic quality. The idea of being trapped in one—in the dark with something truly terrifying in there somewhere—that struck me as a wonderful

premise for a frightening film."

Earlier in the film's production, the two largest stages on the Paramount lot had been transformed into three of the film's major sets: a two-story Museum Diorama Hall filled with a glass-encased wildlife exhibit, the multichambered "superstition exhibit," and the mysterious, underground "backstage" area, where 95 percent of the museum's work is carried out (the exteriors were shot on location at Chicago's Field Museum). Production designer Philip Harrison supervised the creation of more than 20,000 jars of individual species samples suspended in formaldehyde, as well as recreating the Natural History Museum's standard maceration tanks (where flesh is literally soaked off of animal carcasses) and beetle tanks (where thousands of beetles do a similar job).

Police lieutenant Vincent D'Agosta (Tom Sizemore) enters this strange academic world on assignment, in an effort to learn the cause of a series of grisly deaths. His guide to the territory is museum staffer Margo Green (Penelope Ann Miller of *The Shadow*). Neither character, Hyams explains, is prepared for what they're going to find at the bottom of it.

"I think nobody in their right mind is. I wouldn't be. The more incredible the characters think this thing is, the more real it's going to be for the audience. It all rests on the incredulity that's expressed by these charac-



ters. Margo is a rather intelligent, hard-working individual who is thrust into the position of having to deal with something that she's just not equipped to deal with. Tom plays a Chicago police lieutenant who sees this series of absolutely grotesque murders taking place and thinks he's looking for nothing other than a killer, probably a serial killer. The more believable they are, the more real they are, the more they're doing their jobs..."

Hyams, who had not worked with Miller before, was overwhelmed by the actress's ability to convey powerful emotions in the film's most crucial scene. "It's the climactic sequence of this film in which she's confronting this thing and I said to her, 'This



audience can only be as frightened as you appear on the screen. It doesn't matter how people perceive this thing. *You're the one who's going to make them perceive it's there, and you're the one who's going to make them frightened.*

"It was really a case of, you either do it or you don't. You either flat out take the jump or you hold back. If you hold back, it won't work and the audience will know it. And she just did it, which was really one of the most exciting moments I've ever had. It was very touching, I mean, she just *nailed it*."

The cast also includes Linda Hunt, an Oscar-winner for her amazing performance in *The Year of Living Dangerously*, as museum

director Ann Cuthbert, and veteran actor James Whitmore, whose genre credits include *Them!* and *Planet of the Apes*, as Dr. Frock. "Linda plays the head of the museum," Hyams explains. "She's fighting the fight that any museum head's fighting, trying to keep the place open. If the politicians have their way, there won't be museums. They're always trying to close down libraries. These places are going under and they rely totally on their ability to raise funds. She is a kind of valiant character who is trying to save the place she loves. Jim Whitmore plays the curator of the museum, a venerable scientist who has been around for years and years. He's been a proponent of a biological theory that's

a bit odd as to its scientific basis, and still not recognized by a lot of institutions."

While Hyams demures to discuss the film's star creature Kothoga ("a horrific creature with origins drawn from South American mythology," according to the film's press notes) and its origins, he denies that Dr. Frock is its creator.

"He's not the one who opens the Pandora's box," the director says. "He's talking about a certain thing called the Callisto effect, which has to do with a metamorphosis that, rather than being an evolutionary change, is a metamorphosis the way a tadpole turns into a frog. He's saying that under certain conditions, this can happen to other living

Special effects wizard Stan Winston (BELOW) shows stuntman Dick Warlock one way to get ahead in the film business. RIGHT: Evolutionary biologist Margo Green (Penelope Ann Miller) is helped by Chicago police lieutenant Vincent D'Agosta (Tom Sizemore) in a normally tranquil museum turned slaughterhouse.

things — that they can turn into something as disparate from them as the frog is from the tadpole, as the butterfly is from the caterpillar. That's kind of what this film's about."

Walking through the "backstage at the museum" set in a flurry of gadgets and whispers is a team of creature specialists headed by the legendary creature creator Stan Winston, who is charged with the creation and implementation of Kothoga. Academy Award-winner Winston has fathered some of the most memorable movie creatures ever in movies, such as for *Jurassic Park*, *Terminator 2*, *Aliens*, and *The Island of Dr. Moreau* and is currently creating characters for upcoming remake of *Planet of the Apes*. Kothoga, according to Hyams, is "about 80 percent Stan. He had already done work on some stuff, and then it was me seeing what he had done, and commenting on it. He had gone down a road that I wanted to change a bit, kind of nudge him in another direction, and he got it, and agreed, and did it. It was originally more of a beast, as opposed to a creature. A beast is ferocious. If you're in a room with a tiger, you're in deep trouble so you're scared. But they're also gorgeous. I wanted something that was so awful, so repulsive, that killing you would almost be something you'd like to happen right away — you'd rather it kill you than touch you."

"And I wanted it to really be frightening. I was also intrigued by the concept of DNA gone absolutely crazy. I wanted it to be a combination of mammalian, reptilian, insect-like—I wanted to touch on all those things."

"Stan is one of a small group of people who are blending cutting-edge technology with animatronic effects," adds producer Sam Mercer (*Congo*), who is charged with overseeing the implementation of the forty-five-odd visual effects by the firm VFX (with additional work being done by Banned From the Ranch). "What's great about him is he knows how to make the effects seamless in a movie, how animatronics can be mated with practical effects and how they can be mated with digital effects. He's a person who really understands the medium."

In his parallel role as the film's cinematographer, it was Hyams' job to ensure the creature's credibility with his cameras. "You know, they said they had to do closeups on Joan Crawford before they did the masters because, by the afternoon, her face couldn't



hold up. So, I look upon this guy as one of those faded Hollywood stars who demands only a special way of shooting, you can only shoot from a special side. You have to be very, very careful about how you shoot him, and if you shoot him properly, you're rewarded because the design is so wonderful."

The prospect of making Kothoga believable to today's effects-aware audience is precisely the challenge that initially attracted him to the film, Hyams says. "Doing difficult things is extremely appealing to me. I'm drawn to those movies that take you places you've never been to. I am most attracted to those films that are enormous adventures to the eye as well as the heart."

So, how does a fan of Kubrick approach

the sequel to his revolutionary sci-fi epic *2001*? "Well, it was so terrifying that I wouldn't do it unless he gave me his blessing. I was asked to do it, and I said 'No,' and they asked me again, and I said, 'Well, first you have to talk to Arthur Clarke and Stanley Kubrick to see if it's OK with them.' Stanley Kubrick, David Lean, and Steven Spielberg, they're my heroes. So, he was really sweet. He said, 'Make your own movie.' I felt very strongly that the film that I wanted to make was so unlike *2001*, it really couldn't be compared. And because I was so frightened of making the film, the chairman of MGM sent me the reviews for *2001*, and I was shocked because it was *reviled*. All these people who are saying it is a classic now had excoriated it when it came out. It was a group of some of the most vicious reviews I'd ever seen. That actually made me feel a little better."

With just a few more weeks of shooting *The Relic*, Hyams is concentrating solely on delivering an exciting movie in time for its U.S. opening this January with a U.K. release soon to follow.

"This film is going to be another four or five months of absolute chaos," said Hyams of the struggle to complete the project on time. "It's going to be a real crunch, a short, frenetic postproduction schedule. The only way to give Paramount what it wants is to do a whole bunch of things to compress that period. They spent a lot of money on this film. I have three sons and I'm encouraged that they're interested. That makes me feel good. I don't want to screw it up." □



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JANUARY • FEBRUARY U.S. PROGRAMMING SCHEDULE

DAYTIME

TIME	Monday - Friday	Saturday	Sunday
6:00	Informational	Informational	Informational
6:30			
7:00	Animation Station		
7:30			
8:00	(Fri: The Odyssey)		
8:30	Inside Space (Anti-Gravity Room / Friday)		
9:00	Lost in Space	Saturday Anime (movie)	Sci-Fi Buzz
9:30			Inside Space
10:00	Voyage to the Bottom of the Sea		SF Vortex
10:30			Sci-Fi Trader
11:00	Dark Shadows	The Anti-Gravity Room	Alien Nation
11:30	Dark Shadows (Fri: Trader)	The Odyssey	
Noon	Ripley's Believe It or Not	Space Patrol	The Web
12:30		Dracula: The Series	
1:00	Mysteries, Magic, Miracles	Sci-Fi Buzz	The New Edge
1:30	Monsters	Trailer Park	C-Net Central
2:00	Amazing Stories	Moonlight Matinee	Sightings
2:30	Ray Bradbury Theater		
3:00	The Incredible Hulk		Moonlight Matinee
3:30			
4:00	The Bionic Woman	Movie: Mystery Science	
4:30		Theater 3000	
5:00	The Six Million Dollar Man	(effective Feb. 1)	Moonlight Matinee
5:30			
6:00	Mon: The Odyssey / Tue-Fri: Series Collection** (1 hour)	Sci-Fi Trader	
6:30	Mon: Sci-Fi Trader	SF Vortex (new)	

EVENING

Time	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday	Sunday
7:00	Twilight Zone	Twilight Zone	Twilight Zone	Sci-Fi Buzz	She Wolf/London	Sci-Fi Feature	Sightings
7:30	Tales/Dark Side	Tales/Dark Side	Tales/Dark Side	Inside Space		Film	
8:00	Sightings	"V"	"V"	"V"	Movie		Swamp Thing
8:30							Swamp Thing
9:00	VR 5	Time Trax	Time Trax	Time Trax		Sci-Fi Feature	The Flash
9:30						Film or	
10:00	Forever Knight	Forever Knight	Forever Knight	Forever Knight	Friday 13th: Series	Sci-Fi Channel	RoboCop: The
10:30						original movie	Series

LATE NIGHT

Time	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday	Sunday
11:00	Twilight Zone	Twilight Zone	Twilight Zone	Sci-Fi Buzz	She Wolf/London	Movie: Mystery	The Web
11:30	Tales/Dark Side	Tales/Dark Side	Tales/Dark Side	Inside Space		Science Theater	
Midnight	Sightings	"V"	"V"	"V"	Movie	3000 (eff. Feb 1)	The New Edge
12:30							C/Net Central
1:00	VR 5	Time Trax	Time Trax	Time Trax		Trailer Park	Sci-Fi Trader
1:30						Sci-Fi Feature	Space Patrol
2:00	Forever Knight	Forever Knight	Forever Knight	Forever Knight	Friday 13th: Series	Film of	Sightings
2:30						Sci-Fi Channel	
3:00	Informational	Informational	Informational	Thriller	Thriller	Original Movie	SF Vortex
3:30						RoboCop: Series	Informational

All programming shown Eastern Standard Time. Please adapt for your local time zone. All programming subject to change. This schedule is effective through 2/28/96.
 ** Sci-Fi Movie airs one week per month. SF Series Collection titles are Space Rangers, Hammer House of Horror, Nightmare Cafe, Invisible Man, Mann and Machine, Planet of the Apes, Max Headroom; ***Friday, 8:30 am: Anti-Gravity Room.

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Forget those aliens — the world has been conquered by Sci-Fi itself.

Science has made the world a smaller place, shrunk by the new technologies inherent in cellular phones, modems, satellite and cable TV, and the Internet. Places that were once hidden on the other side of the planet are now as close as next door. But while it was the scientists who have reduced the world to a more manageable size, it was left up to science fiction's dreamers and wizards to truly conquer it.

Science fiction is more than just any single country's cultural heritage. Science fiction is not owned by any one of us, but is instead an international pastime. Every culture has its own myths, and today, it is science fiction that is creating those myths for us all.

This is not a new thing. I realized this when I was visiting France back in 1977. As I wandered the length of the Champs Élysées, I could see that Parisian sci-fi fanatics created lines around the block for the new film *La Guerre des Étoiles* that were as long as those in the United States for the original English version of George Lucas' groundbreaking *Star Wars*. (The remastered Special Edition release of which, by the way, is this issue's cover feature.)

The world domination of sci-fi continues. Twenty years later, last summer's blockbuster, *Independence Day*, which has so far, at the time of this writing grossed over \$300 million in U.S. revenues, has now topped \$650 million in world-wide box office income. Filmmakers as concerned about profit margins as the rest of us are about Borgs recognize that the allure of nationalism has been abandoned, to be replaced by a new world market.

In that building of sci-fi dreams, each country has donated a piece of itself, because science fiction is the universal language. The United States brought the optimism of *Star Wars* and *Star Trek*. England gave us *Doctor Who* and *The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy*. Australia brought us *Mad Max* and its many sequels. From Japan came *Gojira*, or as the great, green reptile came to be known outside of his own country, *Godzilla*, *King of the Monsters*.

Russia delivered *Solaris*, based on the novel by Stanislaw Lem, considered by many to be one of the finest SF films ever produced. France's *Cyrano de Bergerac* took us on a voyage to the moon in the 17th Century! Director Fritz Lang gave us Germany's *Metropolis*, with a message that still reverberates today. In 1920, Czechoslovakian

playwright Karel Capek introduced the word "robot" itself in his new play *R.U.R.*

Every country on this planet has its own vision of science fiction, and has made its own contribution to the melting pot of the world's picture of SF. Unfortunately, we are unable to list all the countries of the world and their contributions in this space. Even the pages of this entire magazine would not be sufficient. But it took a veritable sci-fi U.N. to give us the grand *gestalt* that is modern SF.

The Sci-Fi Channel itself has been a moving force in this world-wide embracing of science fiction. From the flagship cable channel begun in 1992 to deliver the cosmic excitement of Sci-Fi to U.S. cable subscribers, the Sci-Fi Channel has rapidly expanded to become the number one delivery medium for SF in the galaxy.

USA Latin America was the first to spin off from the mothership in April 1994. It devotes its Saturday programming block to the Sci-Fi Channel for 18 Latin American countries — Mexico, Guatemala, Honduras, El Salvador, Nicaragua, Costa Rica, Panama, Colombia, Ecuador, Peru, Venezuela, Bolivia, Paraguay, Uruguay, Chile, Argentina, the Dominican Republic and Brazil.

The Sci-Fi Channel Europe was the next to feed the international hunger for a dose of imagination. Since November 1995, the Sci-Fi Channel Europe has beamed its cosmic vision to the United Kingdom, Scandinavia, Benelux, and Southern Africa. Other outposts will surely follow as today turns into tomorrow.

Think of it. As you sit down to watch the relaunch of *Mystery Science Theatre 3000*, exclusively on the Sci-Fi Channel (see this issue's article for further details), other fans will be doing the same at all points of the globe.

Science fiction is turning into a sort of universal language that crosses all borders and bridges all cultural gaps. While the politicians debate how to bring peace to the world and study new weapons systems for their own defense, maybe they should realize that instead of flinging missiles at each other, they should continue beaming the best sci-fi of yesterday, today and tomorrow.

The world, as I said at the top of this page, has grown smaller. Much too small for wars any longer. Perhaps if we keep working at it, science fiction can bring us together in ways that politics and governments never could.

Scott Edelman

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JAN-FEB MOVIES AND SPEC

FRIDAY, JANUARY 3

8:00 p.m. **Fright Night**
1985, Horror, Chris Sarandon,
Roddy McDowall
12:00 a.m. **Fright Night**
1985, Horror, Chris Sarandon,
Roddy McDowall

SATURDAY, JANUARY 4

9:00 a.m. **Project A-KO**
1986, Anime
2:00 p.m. **The Clone Master**
1978, Science Fiction, Art
Hindle, Ralph Baker
4:00 p.m. **The Mutations**
1974, Science Fiction, Donald
Pleasant, Tom Baker
7:00 p.m. **The UFO Incident**
1975, Documentary, James
Earl Jones, Estelle Parsons
9:00 p.m. **Timemaster**
1996, Science Fiction, Jesse
Glickenhau, Michael Dorn
11:00 p.m. **The Mutations**
1974, Science Fiction, Donald
Pleasant, Tom Baker
1:30 a.m. **Timemaster**
1996, Science Fiction, Jesse
Glickenhau, Michael Dorn

SUNDAY, JANUARY 5

3:00 p.m. **Z.P.G.**
1972, Science Fiction, Oliver
Reed, Geraldine Chaplin
5:00 p.m. **Timemaster**
1996, Science Fiction, Jesse
Glickenhau, Michael Dorn

MONDAY, JANUARY 6

8:00 p.m. **Star Trek II: The
Wrath of Khan**
1982, Science Fiction, William
Shatner, Leonard Nimoy
12:00 a.m. **Star Trek II: The
Wrath of Khan**
1982, Science Fiction, William
Shatner, Leonard Nimoy

TUESDAY, JANUARY 7

8:00 p.m. **Alien**
1979, Horror, Sigourney
Weaver, Tom Skerritt
12:00 a.m. **Alien**
1979, Horror, Sigourney
Weaver, Tom Skerritt

WEDNESDAY, JANUARY 8

7:00 p.m. **The Abyss**
1989, Science Fiction, Ed
Harris, Mary E. Mastroianni
11:00 p.m. **The Abyss**
1989, Science Fiction, Ed
Harris, Mary E. Mastroianni

THURSDAY, JANUARY 9

8:00 p.m. **Indiana Jones and
the Temple of Doom**
1984, Action, Harrison Ford,
Kate Capshaw
12:00 a.m. **Indiana Jones and
the Temple of Doom**
1984, Action, Harrison Ford,
Kate Capshaw

FRIDAY, JANUARY 10

8:00 p.m. **Hellraiser**
1987, Horror, Andrew
Robinson, Claire Higgins
12:00 a.m. **Hellraiser**
1987, Horror, Andrew

Robinson, Claire Higgins

SATURDAY, JANUARY 11
9:00 a.m. **Odin: Photon Space
Sailor Starlight**
1987, Anime
2:00 p.m. **Agent for H.A.R.M.**
1966, Science Fiction, Mark
Richman, Wendell Corey
4:00 p.m. **Timemaster**
1996, Science Fiction, Jesse
Glickenhau, Michael Dorn
7:00 p.m. **Videodrome**
1983, Science Fiction, James
Woods, Deborah Harry
9:00 p.m. **The Legacy**
1979, Horror, Katherine Ross,
Sam Elliott
11:00 p.m. **Shadowzone**
1989, Science Fiction, Louise
Fletcher, David Beecroft
1:30 a.m. **The Legacy**
1979, Horror, Katherine Ross,
Sam Elliott

SUNDAY, JANUARY 12

3:00 p.m. **To Die For**
1989, Horror, Brendan
Hughes, Scott Jacoby
5:00 p.m. **Vampire at
Midnight**
1988, Vampires, Jason
Williams, Gustav Vintas

FRIDAY, JANUARY 17

8:00 p.m. **Suspiria**
1977, Horror, Jessica Harper,
Stefania Casini
12:00 a.m. **Suspiria**
1977, Horror, Jessica Harper,
Stefania Casini

SATURDAY, JANUARY 18

9:00 a.m. **Dominion: Tank
Police Part 1**
1989, Anime
2:00 p.m. **Devil's Daughter**
1972, Dracula, Shelly Winters,
Belinda Montgomery

4:30 p.m. **Mandroid**
1993, Science Fiction, Brian
Cousins, Jane Caldwell
7:00 p.m. **The Thing**
1982, Science Fiction, Kurt
Russell, Donald Moffat

9:00 p.m. **Phoenix**
1996, Science Fiction, Brad
Dourif, Billy Drago
11:00 p.m. **Devil's Daughter**
1972, Dracula, Shelly
Winters, Belinda
Montgomery

1:30 a.m. **Phoenix**
1996, Science Fiction, Brad
Dourif, Billy Drago

SUNDAY, JANUARY 19

3:00 p.m. **Resurrection**
1980, Fantasy, Ellen Burstyn,
Sam Shepard
5:00 p.m. **Phoenix**
1996, Science Fiction, Brad
Dourif, Billy Drago

FRIDAY, JANUARY 24

8:00 p.m. **Omen 4: The
Awakening**
1991, Horror, Faye Grant,
Michael Woods

12:00 a.m. **Omen 4: The**

Awakening
1991, Horror, Faye Grant,
Michael Woods

SATURDAY, JANUARY 25

9:00 a.m. **Dominion: Tank
Police Part 2**
1990, Anime
1:30 p.m. **Making of MST3K**
1997, Documentary
2:00 p.m. **Fantastic Voyage**
1966, Science Fiction, Stephen
Boyd, Raquel Welch
4:00 p.m. **Phoenix**
1996, Science Fiction, Brad
Dourif, Billy Drago
7:00 p.m. **Darkman**
1990, Action, Liam Neeson,
Frances McDonauld
9:00 p.m. **Cool World**
1992, Fantasy, Gabriel Byrne,
Kim Basinger
11:00 p.m. **Fantastic Voyage**
1966, Science Fiction, Stephen
Boyd, Raquel Welch
1:30 a.m. **Cool World**
1992, Fantasy, Gabriel Byrne,
Kim Basinger

SUNDAY, JANUARY 26

3:00 p.m. **Bloodstains:
Subspecies 2**
1993, Horror, Andres Hove,
Denise Duff
5:00 p.m. **Bloodlust:
Subspecies 3**
1994, Horror, Andres Hove,
Denise Duff
8:00 p.m. **Making of MST3K**
1997, Documentary

SATURDAY, FEBRUARY 1

9:00 a.m. **Project A-KO vs
Battles 1 & 2**

*The original Alien airs January 7 on
the Sci-Fi Channel.*



ALS ON THE SCI-FI CHANNEL

1991, Science Fiction, Anime
2:00 p.m. Trancers 4: Jack of
Swords

1993, Science Fiction, Tim
Thompson, Stacie Randall
3:30 p.m. Making of MST3
9:07, Documentary, TBA
4:00 p.m. Revenge of the
Creature

1955, Horror, John Agar, Lori
Nelson
7:00 p.m. Invisible: The
Chronicles of Benjamin
Knight

1993, Science Fiction, Brian
Cousins, Jennifer Nash
9:00 p.m. New Eden
1994, Science Fiction, Lisa
Bonet, Steve Baldwin
11:00 p.m. Revenge of the
Creature

1955, Horror, John Agar, Lori
Nelson
1:30 a.m. New Eden
1994, Science Fiction, Lisa
Bonet, Steve Baldwin

SUNDAY, FEBRUARY 2
3:00 p.m. Invisible: The
Chronicles of Benjamin
Knight

1993, Science Fiction, Brian
Cousins, Jennifer Nash
5:00 p.m. New Eden
1994, Science Fiction, Lisa
Bonet, Steve Baldwin

MONDAY, FEBRUARY 3
9:01 a.m. Official Denial
1993, Science Fiction, Parker
Stevenson, Erin Grey
1:01 p.m. Official Denial
1993, Science Fiction, Parker
Stevenson, Erin Grey

TUESDAY, FEBRUARY 4
9:01 a.m. Colossus: The
Forbin Project
1970, Science Fiction, Eric
Braeden, Susan Clark
1:01 a.m. Colossus: The
Forbin Project
1970, Science Fiction, Eric
Braeden, Susan Clark

WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 5
9:01 a.m. Warning Signs
1985, Science Fiction, Sam
Waterson, Kathleen Quinlan
1:01 a.m. Warning Signs
1985, Science Fiction, Sam
Waterson, Kathleen Quinlan

THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 6
9:01 a.m. Scanners
1981, Science Fiction, Jennifer
O'Neill, Patrick McGodhan
1:31 a.m. Scanners
1981, Science Fiction, Jennifer
O'Neill, Patrick McGodhan

FRIDAY, FEBRUARY 7
8:01 a.m. Phantasm
1979, Horror, Michael
Baldwin, Angus Scrimm
12:01 a.m. Phantasm
1979, Horror, Michael
Baldwin, Angus Scrimm

SATURDAY, FEBRUARY 8
9:00 a.m. Record of Lodoss
War

1991, Science Fiction, Anime
2:00 p.m. New Eden
1994, Science Fiction, Lisa
Bonet, Steve Baldwin
4:00 p.m. Leech Woman
1960, Horror, Coleen Gray,
Grant Williams

7:00 p.m. Xtro 2: The 2nd
Encounter
1991, Science Fiction, Jan
Michael Vincent, Paul Koslo
9:00 p.m. Critters 2: The
Main Course
1988, Science Fiction, Scott
Grimes, Liane Curtis
11:00 p.m. Leech Woman
1960, Horror, Coleen Gray,
Grant Williams
1:00 a.m. Critters 2: The Main
Course
1988, Science Fiction, Scott
Grimes, Liane Curtis

SUNDAY, FEBRUARY 9
3:00 p.m. Robot Wars
1993, Science Fiction, Don
Michael Paul, Barbara
Crampton
4:30 p.m. Pin
1988, Horror, David Hewlett,
Cindy Preston

FRIDAY, FEBRUARY 14
8:01 p.m. The Guardian
1990, Horror, Jenny
Deagrove, Dwier Brown
12:01 a.m. The Guardian
1990, Horror, Jenny
Deagrove, Dwier Brown

SATURDAY, FEBRUARY 15
9:00 a.m. Gall Force: Eternal
Story
1989, Science Fiction, Anime
2:00 p.m. Dr. Jekyll & Sister
Hyde

1972, Gothic Horror, Ralph
Bates, Martine Beswick
4:00 p.m. The Mole People
1956, Science Fiction, John
Agar, Cynthia Patrick
7:00 p.m. Spectre
1977, Horror, Robert Culp,
Gig Young
9:00 p.m. SFC Original
Movie: TBA

11:00 p.m. The Mole People
1956, Science Fiction, John
Agar, Cynthia Patrick
1:30 a.m. SFC Original
Movie: TBA

SUNDAY, FEBRUARY 16
3:00 p.m. The Final Eye
1982, Science Fiction, Joseph
Cortese, Susan George
5:00 p.m. SFC Original
Movie: TBA

MONDAY, FEBRUARY 17
9:00 a.m. Spiderman
1978, Superhero, Nicholas
Hammond, Robert Simon
11:00 a.m. Spiderman: The
Deadly Dust

1978, Superhero, Nicholas
Hammond, Robert Simon
1:00 p.m. Captain America
1979, Superhero, Red Brown,
Len Berman
3:00 p.m. Captain America 2
1979, Superhero, Red Brown,
Len Berman
5:00 p.m. Dr. Strange
1978, Superhero, Peter
Hooten, Jessica Walter
7:00 p.m. Incredible Hulk
Returns

1988, Science Fiction, Bill
Bixby, Lou Ferrigno
9:01 p.m. Trial of the
Incredible Hulk
1989, Science Fiction, Bill
Bixby, Lou Ferrigno
11:00 p.m. Death of the
Incredible Hulk
1989, Science Fiction, Bill
Bixby, Lou Ferrigno
1:01 a.m. Spiderman: The
Chinese Web
1978, Superhero, Nicholas
Hammond, Robert Simon

FRIDAY, FEBRUARY 21
8:01 p.m. World of Dracula
1979, Horror, Michael Nouri,
Carol Baxter
12:01 a.m. World of Dracula
1979, Horror, Michael Nouri,
Carol Baxter

SATURDAY, FEBRUARY 22
9:00 a.m. Roujinz
1992, Science Fiction, Anime
2:00 p.m. SFC Original
Movie: TBA

4:00 p.m. The Deadly Mantis
1957, Science Fiction, Craig
Steven, William Hopper
7:00 p.m. Alligator
1980, Horror, Robert Forster,
Robin Riker
9:00 p.m. Alligator 2: The
Mutation

1990, Science Fiction, Steve
Railsback, Dee Wallace Stone
11:00 p.m. The Deadly
Mantis
1957, Science Fiction, Craig
Steven, William Hopper
1:30 a.m. Alligator 2: The
Mutation

1990, Science Fiction, Steve
Railsback, Dee Wallace Stone
SUNDAY, FEBRUARY 23
3:00 p.m. Journey to the Far
Side of the Sun
1969, Science Fiction, Roy
Thinnies, Lynn Loring
5:00 p.m. The Car
1977, Horror, James Brolin,
Kathleen Lloyd

FRIDAY, FEBRUARY 28
8:01 p.m. Waxwork 2: Lost in
Time
1991, Horror, Zach Galligan,
Alexander Godunov
12:01 a.m. Waxwork 2: Lost
in Time
1991, Horror, Zach Galligan,
Alexander Godunov

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Pass the popcorn! A mammoth new movie guide delivers the ultimate sci-fi Psychotronic flicks.

BY LAWRENCE TUCKER

FOR SEVERAL YEARS NOW, as a faithful reader of *Psychotronic Video* magazine — a lively, slightly fannish, marvelously knowledgeable guide to exploitation films and B-movies — I have had the same recurring fantasy. In it, I journey to the upstate New York home of *Psychotronic*'s editor and publisher, Michael Weldon, and ring his bell.

When he comes to the door, I whip out a two-by-four — or possibly an axe handle — and

proceed to smash him over the head again and again, shrieking, "There's no apostrophe in the possessive *its*! No apostrophe in *theirs*! Only one o in *lose*!" — smashing and shrieking, over and over, until I've pounded his head to a bloody pulp. While I realize this may sound somewhat harsh, I'm sure you'll agree that nothing's more important than proper spelling and punctuation. And the lack of these in *Psychotronic* has always bugged me.

Weldon has admitted that he's been too busy to give his magazine a decent proofreading, and now I know why: He's been working on *The Psychotronic Video Guide* (New York: St. Martin's Griffin, 656 pp., \$29.95 pb), a massive phone-book-sized reference to more than nine thousand of the kind of movies that he regularly covers in the magazine: schlocky ones, shocking ones, and genre films of every sort, including sci-fi and horror films from blockbusters like *The Terminators* to obscurities like *Plan Ten from Outer Space* (a "musical sci-fi comedy" shot in Salt Lake City); Italian thrillers known as *gialli*; spaghetti westerns, Asian martial arts films, and other action imports; jd (juvenile delinquent), rock, and hot rod films; blaxploitation films; and even some silents and serials now available on video.

It's by far the biggest reference of its kind. Weldon's guidebook has been a long time coming. True, many movies can be described as "long-awaited" — *Alien* sequels, further installments of the *Star Wars* series, Spielberg's *The Lost World* — but few books can. This is one of them. It's described on the back cover as a sequel to Weldon's 1983 *Psychotronic Encyclopedia of Film* — and therein lies the problem: You really need both books if you want anything approaching complete coverage, and there's no sure way of predicting what's in which.

Generally, this new *Video Guide* leaves out what was already covered in the *Encyclopedia* (which, at 830 pages, was longer but contained fewer titles). The first book listed a 1957 film called *Dragstrip Girl* ("Car crazy, speed crazy, boy crazy!" shouted the ads; "Thrill-hungry teens on a reckless rampage!"); the new book lists a 1994 film with the same name (starring Natalie Wood's daughter). The first book included the 1931 Bela Lugosi *Dracula*; this one lists the 1992 *Bram Stoker's Dracula* — but also the 1931 Spanish-language *Dracula*, filmed at night on the same sets Tod Browning used, and recently released on video.

Sometimes, however, the arrangement is less chronological. The first book included *The Lodger* — the 1944 film starring Laird Cregar; this one has the 1926 silent film directed by Alfred Hitchcock. The first book included the 1932 and 1941 versions of *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*; this book lists a 1973 musical TV version starring Kirk Douglas and two 1920 silent versions, one of them virtually unknown.

One of the chief delights of both books is simply the litany of movie titles they contain. Cumulatively, they conjure up a whole world of lurid posters (or video boxes), hot buttered popcorn (or the microwaved variety), and cheap thrills. The first book offered, among much else, this brace of warnings: *Don't Answer the Phone*, *Don't Be Afraid of the Dark*, *Don't Go in the House*, *Don't Knock the Rock*, *Don't Knock the Twist*, *Don't Look in the Basement*, *Don't Look Now*, and *Don't Open the Window*. Not to be outdone, the new book warns *Don't Bother to Knock*, *Don't Go in the Woods (Alone)*, *Don't Go Near the Park*, *Don't Go to Sleep*, *Don't Look Back*, *Don't Look in the Attic*, *Don't Make Waves*, *Don't Open 'Til Christmas*, *Don't Tell Daddy*, *Don't Torture the Duckling*, and *Don't Worry*,



Prepare yourself to be shocked by the schlockiest sci-fi movies of all time, thanks to tour guide Michael Weldon, editor of *The Psychotronic Video Guide to Film*.

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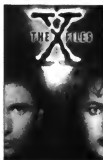
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Occasionally the listings in the new book form a kind of neurotic monologue worthy of an analyst's couch: *My Best Friend Is a Vampire*, *My Grandpa Is a Vampire*, *My Stepmother Is an Alien*, and *My Mom's a Werewolf*.

Weldon is a mine of such trivia. Did you know, for example, that in 1989, two years before the big-budget *Terminator 2*, there was already a movie called *Terminator II* ("an Italian ripoff")? Do you know where Michael Myers, John Carpenter's *Halloween* killer, got his name? (From "the British distributor who helped make John Carpenter's *Assault on Precinct 13* a hit in the UK.")

As in his magazine, Weldon rarely passes up the chance for a bit of necrology. Of Pier Paolo Pasolini's *Salo*: "The director was bludgeoned to death by a teenage boy while this, his last feature, was being edited." Of *Pottergeist II*: "The older sister is missing because actress Dominique Dunne was murdered after the first movie." Of *Robocop 2*: "A real-life psycho who killed six people claimed that he copied a slashing in this movie."

Weldon is wonderfully adept at summarizing schlocky movies — and subtly (if affectionately) putting them down — simply by listing a few of the high points. Of *Fear*: "This giallo mystery has nudity, nightmares, a sick ending, a bat attack, and a giant spider." Of *Heart of Midnight*: "This confused movie has many attempts at surrealism, lots of flashbacks, and a girl in a rubber dress chained up." Of William Friedkin's *The Guardian*: "There's a vicious wolf attack and a tree that kills would-be rapist bikers ... There are some nude-nanny scenes." Of *Deathstalker*, starring onetime *Playboy* icon Barbi Benton: "There's lots of nudity, raping, blood, mud-wrestling, decapitation, dwarfs, and an ugly board-headed beast man. The villain magically turns into Barbi at one point, and Lana Clarkson has a topless swordfighting scene."

This deadpan humor gives *The Psychotronic Video Guide* its special tone. (One review, of the Spanish-based movie *Chulih Mansion*, ends with the gentle suggestion, "You can see the microphone and watch for continuity problems to pass the time.") Weldon has a talent for poking fun at movies simply by summarizing their plots, usually in the driest of declarative sentences. Here, we close out our comments with his review, in its entirety, of a movie called *Plucked*: "In one of the stranger European movies to reach these shores, a couple (Gina Lollobrigida and Jean-Louis Trintignant) run a modern, high-tech chicken-breeding ranch. The husband (who is a mass murderer) and sexy Ewa Aulin (*Candy*) plot to kill his wife. A group called 'the Association' conducts genetic experiments on the chickens, resulting in mutant all-white-meat chickens with out heads." □



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(Signed) Mark Hantz, Publisher, Nov 22, 1996

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10,000 or 20,000 feet. Some even go as high as 30,000 feet. These people want to go into space. They're like "garage" rocket scientists." Among them was Rikki Rockett, drummer from the glam-rock band Poison, an avid rocket enthusiast.

His work as producer of *Inside Space* is the ideal job for Dave Brody. His father was a scientist, his brother a biologist, and his own college degree is in TV production. He always wanted to do TV, but he's actually a survivor of the music industry, and after making some connections at NASA after doing industrial film work for them, he landed this "total dream job. I get to hang around with brilliant people, from amateurs to astronauts to real rocket scientists. There's a bond between us, we space-oids. A camaraderie, as there is among sailors or musicians. We want to go to outer space. We want our viewers to go. I want *Inside Space* to be the town square for these people."

And future plans for *Inside Space*?

"Comparatively speaking, *Inside Space* is a pretty low-budget show, but we've got big dreams. Enormous dreams: huge numbers of people living and working in space. *Inside Space* wants to try to get a human component into every show. One topic we'll be exploring in a future episode is a thing called GPS, or Global Positioning System. With the help of military satellites, you can have a device the size of a pocket calculator and be able to determine your location within a few hundred meters. So quite soon you'll be able to sit in your car, talk to the dashboard and it'll orient you. Basically, in the future, it'll be really difficult to get lost on road trips.

Dave Brody also hopes to use more special correspondents in the coming seasons. People such as Story Musgrave, NASA's oldest astronaut, famed as the man who fixed the Hubble telescope. "Half the people who go up in space get space sick. It's not like being seasick or carsick; it's a whole new thing. You never know who's going to get it, or when. You do know that you'll have to cover for each other. But Story Musgrave never gets sick. He may actually be an extra-terrestrial; at least he thinks so!" Watch for him in episodes to come.

And the future of space in general?

Brody anticipates that "there will be a huge privatization. A lot of us want to go into space. It costs too much with the government involved. If the government were involved in air travel, there'd be one big hugely expensive plane taking off once every few days. For now, that's the only way we can fly. We have to get the government out of the space program. If we reduce government involvement, it'll reduce costs."

"It's vital to remember that space is a place, not a program, not a project. We want to go, and we'll take our viewers with us." □

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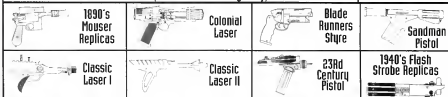
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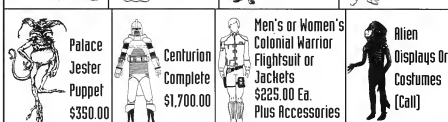
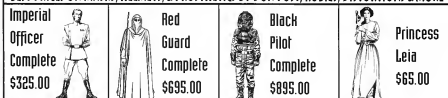
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FUTURE SHOCK

Continued from page 16

unfortunately, the well-reviewed documentary seems unlikely to find its way to American theaters. Hopefully, it will find a home on cable, or some enterprising video house hoping to extract the last bit of blood from Ed Wood's corpse will distribute it on cassette.

A Kingly trio: *Apt Pupil*, from the Stephen King novella about a troubled suburban teen who adopts a Nazi war criminal as his mentor, is scheduled to begin shooting in February with Bryan Singer (*The Usual Suspects*) directing. Ian McClellan and young Brad Renfro play the unlikely pair, with Vincent Perez (*The Crow II*) as a sympathetic teacher. Frank Darabont, who wrote and directed *The Shawshank Redemption*, having finished the script for the next *Star Wars* movie, will return to King—and to prison—for his next project. He will adapt and direct King's recent serial novel, *The Green Mile*, set on death row, for Castle Rock. HBO has picked up another King property, *Rose Madder*, about an abused woman's flight from her psychotic husband—the first time a King property has been developed for cable.

In other horror news, Anne Rice has signed a deal with TriStar Television to develop a one-hour drama U.S. consumption for CBS network's 1997-98 season. The untitled project, set in New Orleans, concerns a police officer who forms a crime-busting alliance with the ghost of a dead cop, murdered in the 1950s.

The fact that young actor Jake Busey sharply resembles his famous father, Gary, seems not to have slowed down his career. Since making his film debut in the indie/cult film *S.F.W.* in 1995, Busey has completed a role in Paul Verhoeven's *Starship Troopers*, and is currently playing a "New Age" guru who takes a dim view of aliens in Robert Zemeckis's *Contact*. Next up is *Horne Fries* at Warner Brothers, in which Busey will play one of two brothers, both obsessed with a character played by Drew Barrymore—one brother (Jake) loves Drew, and the other wants to kill her.

Space Cadet, a comedy about a mission to Mars starring Harland Williams, with Shelley Duvall and Beau Bridges, is now shooting in Houston, Texas.

Ben Cross, as an extraterrestrial whose species is in danger of extinction, impregnates Sean Young in *The Invader*. Writer-director Mark Rosman is currently shooting the low-budget sci-fi romance in Vancouver.

Though pressured to push back *The Truman Show* until after *The Mask II*, Jim Carrey ultimately decided to proceed with the riskier film first—a gutsy move after industry disappointment with *The Cable Guy*. The director is Peter Weir, whose flair for the metaphysical gesture distinguished such films as *The Last Wave*, *Picnic at Hanging Rock* and his recent *Fearless*. □

MARS ATTACKS

Continued from page 17

don't want to have them eating off of the Van Buren china.

While the events of the movie are not meant to be seen as prophetic, Close is a believer in life on other worlds. "I've always felt that there are aliens out there. I think it would be incredibly presumptuous to think we're the only life form in the whole cosmos. I think it's a matter of time. I took cosmology courses in college. It's amazing, I think if we contemplated about that a little bit more and realized how actually weeny and insignificant we are, maybe we'd realize how our behavior on this planet is ridiculous."

Actress Annette Bening, who plays Art Land's new age guru wife, has less of a personal attachment to the film's themes. "I don't think that there's life on other planets, but I really liked playing Barbara Land, because Barbara is one of those people who believe that all possibilities exist in the universe, and so when she hears that there's Martians landing, she's very open to the idea and finds it very affirming. I think she believes that it's a sign, that the universe is speaking back, and maybe things aren't as horrible in the world right now as everybody thinks. This is truly the change, the big moment that everyone's been waiting for. Now things are going to improve, and there's a whole New Age beginning. So she goes out to meet them, and she's just full of optimism and hope."

Working with spouse Nicholson for the first time proved to be a learning experience for Bening.

"Jack's a wonderful husband. He was so funny. He made me laugh so hard that I really did break. I couldn't keep a straight face working with him, and when you see the picture, you'll know. You've seen the way he looks. You don't recognize him. He's a great talent. He's a wonderful actor, and I had never worked with him before. I know him, but I had never acted with him. It always helps if you know somebody. You have a relationship and you have a trust. Jack's such a pro that even if you'd never worked with him, he was really somebody that would make you feel comfortable and really set you at ease. It was fun to know that he was going to be there, and that we were both playing these real different characters than ourselves. We had a good time."

If the movie-going public has only half as much fun watching the movie as this all-star cast has had filming it, then the success of *Mars Attacks!* is guaranteed. The only question for those of us for whom the movie industry is the world's most exciting horse race will be whether the film will approach the \$650 million (and counting) worldwide gross of its main invading competitor *Independence Day*. For further developments, keep watching the skies! □

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INFINITE CHANNELS

Continued from page 32

ers' astute questions.

Warner Bros.' Official *Babylon 5* Web Site (<http://www.babylon5.com/cmp/>) gets kudos for navigability and its attractive graphical interface, neither of which slows the site down (the same can't be said of Paramount's *Star Trek: Continuum*). Here you'll find the best collection of images from the show, as well as original sounds and videos that were created just for the Web site. This frequently updated site also has cast bios, a B5 FAQ (frequently asked questions) document, an excellent episode guide, and video previews of the week's upcoming episode. An added bonus: downloadable Apple QuickTime VR tours of Medlab and the Observation Dome.

Have you noticed how Captain John Sheridan and Ambassador Delenn have been growing closer? Casual and fervent followers of this relationship alike will revel in the John & Delenn Home Page (<http://www.speedlink.com/bbarrett/b5/>), a unique site that provides painstakingly detailed episode synopses which, of course, pay particular attention to the Sheridan and Delenn developments. These are complemented by images from the episodes, and related audio and video clips, so even if you're relatively new to the series, you'll have no trouble tracing the course of this relationship. Plus, there's an archive of JMS's posts on CompuServe as specifically pertains to Sheridan and Delenn.

If you're a spoiler-a-holic, visit The *Babylon 5* Spoiler Junkies Page (<http://www.vlsi.com/~wildfoto/spoilers.html>). The site keeps things simple, but is kept up-to-date with details on upcoming *Babylon 5* episodes; there's also a page devoted to Sheridan and Delenn and an assortment of images, many of which were grabbed directly from the televised episodes.

Like their *Star Trek* counterparts, it seems as though every *Babylon 5* actor is gaining a spot in cyberspace. An excellent resource is The Mira Furlan Reference Site (<http://www.odysee.net/~shaka/mf/index.html>). This searchable site is dedicated to providing transcripts of published interviews with Furlan, as well as a complete list of credits, reviews of Furlan's acting career in her native Yugoslavia, and links to Furlan-specific sound and video clips housed on other Web sites. Alternatively, The Mira Furlan Page (<http://www.hookup.net/~bjust/B5/>) does overlap some in content, but has a more aesthetic design. The

Claudia Christian Web Page (<http://www.cris.com/~ivanova/>) is the place to go for images, convention reports, interview transcripts, and biographical and resume data on the actress.

For a more communal take on *Babylon 5*, there's the eponymously-named Web archive of The Zocalo (<http://www.highfiber.com/~katana/>), an entertaining and information-packed weekly e-mail newsletter that keeps B5 addicts up to date through interviews, convention reports, the latest merchandising news, a trading area, and episode discussions.

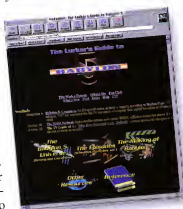
Speaking of addicts, the *Babylon 5* Addicts Page (<http://www.verinet.com/~analyse/b5/b5.html>) combines excellent graphical design with solid background information on the different races of *Babylon 5*, an original, fan-designed *Babylon 5* online comic, and a page listing fanfiction involving the characters of Sheridan and Delenn.

Miss a pivotal scene in *Babylon 5*'s arc? Before you blast your VCR out the next jumpgate for messing up, visit the appropriately-named ISN (<http://www.mit.edu:8001/afs/athena.mit.edu/user/m/e/mego/o/www/isn.html>), bar none the site to go to for video clips from *Babylon 5*. The site is extremely well-organized, and excerpts are linked back to the episode description at the Lurker's Guide. Be forewarned, though: Depending on the length, downloading a clip can take upwards of 30 minutes using a 28.8 Kbps modem.

The Down Below Sound Archive for *Babylon 5* (<http://amik.uwoy.edu/~seker/bab5/index.html>) is the ultimate site for accessing B5 audio excerpts. The archive is searchable by keyword and by episode title, and has over 575 (the equivalent of 63 megabytes) of sound files; or you can skip straight to a page featuring the site's top ten downloaded sounds. If it's not at Down Below, then chances are you'll find the quote you're looking for at Agammemnon's *Babylon 5* Sound Site (<http://rampages.onramp.net/~brummett/b5.html>).

Confused by *Babylon 5*'s cacophony of characters and alien species? Voltayre's Encyclopedia Xenobiologica Online (<http://ccwf.c.utexas.edu/~atropos/Voltayre/vex.html>) will help clear things up. This easy-to-navigate, graphics-intensive reference guide to B5 explains not only the people and races you'll encounter on the show, but also the locations, political and religious contingents, and the different technologies found in the *Babylon 5* universe.

Considering that the Web is continuing to grow at a breakneck pace, it's not likely you'll run out of answers anytime soon. □



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STAR CONTACT

Continued from page 53

were another man I would kill you where you stand," we have those ten years of history passing between us. It's very interesting. It's rare that actors, particularly in Hollywood, get a chance to work in this kind of way."

In one of the more significant—and most subtle—character developments, Geordi appears without his vision-enhancing VISOR eyepiece. But don't expect any fanfare: "Every time they went to write a scene about this monumental change in the life of this character, it stopped the action," explains Burton. "And the first rule of storytelling is serve the story."

Burton, for one, doesn't miss the VISOR. "I had been wanting this to happen for a long time. Physically, the VISOR was painful to wear, and I just got tired of the headaches. They screwed it in to my head; that's how they got it to stay on. On a spiritual level, it is sinful to cover an actor's eyes. I didn't realize how differently the other actors related to me until this movie, when that barrier was removed and people were all of a sudden engaging Geordi differently. That's when I knew we had made the right decision. I'm really happy with the look. Interestingly enough, the contact lenses themselves are not blue. They are white with highly articulated designs on them. I guess that the design is so that when I put them in my brown eyes, the lenses themselves look blue. It's pretty wild."

Dorn, whose character has been serving on *Deep Space Nine*, notes that Worf "is the same guy. Except he's happier. He's back home now. That's one of the things that I played is that, even though you can't tell that he's happy, he was excited about being there [on the Enterprise], and he was like, 'OK, let's go to work.' You don't have to know where he came from."

If you never watched the *Star Trek* shows, it's just this guy is on there and welcome back."

Working with Stewart during a standoff on the bridge posed a challenge to Dorn. "The problem with acting with Patrick is that he and I, we look at these things that we do, and it's hard for us to keep a straight face. We see the ridiculousness of acting. It's fun, we love what we do, but at times, there's a sort of like surrealistic thing going where we'd look at each other and go, 'you're yelling at a guy with bumps on his head.'"

"I'm very realistic about where I am on the totem pole as far as the *Star Trek* cast is concerned," Sirtis says realistically. "Patrick is the lead, and Brent is coming up close behind, and the rest of us is kind of fill in where we're needed. I only hope that they continue in the vein that they seem to have started, that in each movie they've found something different for me to do. I was very involved in the action, and I was actually driving the ship in the first movie, which had never happened before."

Sirtis is one of the few to discuss the under-

lying pressure surrounding this, *The Next Generation's* first solo foray into feature films.

"No one actually vocalized that while we were shooting, but I've gathered over the last two days that it was in the back of everyone's mind, that the first movie wasn't really a *Next Generation* movie, and this one really is."

In addition to the *Next Generation* cast, *First Contact* has three prominently-featured guest stars: Alice Krige as the Borg Queen, James Cromwell as Zefram Cochrane, and Alfie Woodard as Cochrane's assistant, Lily. "We were very lucky that we got all of our first choices," says Frakes of his guest cast.

"I loved his journey," says Cromwell of his role. "I loved the fact that I got the chance to sort of send-up the *Star Trek* hero. Any hero is still a human being, and puts on his pants one leg at a time. To me, the whole concept of a hero is somebody who manages to transcend his fear, go through his fear, and embrace his fear as an adventurer rather than as a warrior."

A long-time actor on stage, film, and television, Cromwell's career took off after his Oscar-nominated turn in *Babe* — "For the first time in my life, I actually have a career, instead of what I used to call a career," Cromwell is fond of saying. "I now know I never have to start from zero again."

Cromwell explains that working on *Star Trek* was different not only for the atmosphere, but for the fact that, "because Jonathan was in a lot of my shots, he had to go around and watch it in the monitor, which meant that I'd get a chance to watch my own performance. I personally prefer that, because I see things in my performance, little technical things that, if I were directing myself I would tell myself not to do."

"The reason I did it was the running and the jumping," says Woodard — best known as a dramatic actress — gleefully. "They sent me the script, and I was responding out loud while I was reading along."

Woodard embraced the opportunity to do her own stunts, although she didn't walk away from the production unscathed. Her elbows are badly scarred, "from when the Borg attacked and Jamey and I were diving around out in the woods," she explains, "and I completely shredded my arms. And I had bruises all over me from crawling in the Jeffries Tubes."

"The hope, obviously, is that the movie will stand as a wonderful piece of entertainment that just happens to be a *Star Trek* movie," says Frakes. "I think the opening montage will suggest enough to the non-Trekker that Picard has had something to do with these evil Borg, and that's really all they need. The intricacies and the minutiae of *Star Trek* are not an essential part to enjoying the film."

Looking forward, Berman says, "We'll be able to sit down and start developing a new film, which we'll be doing I'm sure right after Christmas-time, and keep working on the television series. I think we're going to have a tough time bettering ourselves on the next movie, but that kind of makes it fun." □

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The Series Collection

Max Headroom

CYBERPUNK WAS NOTHING IF NOT a Reese's Peanutbutter Cup, the heady, confusing collision of style and substance, commercialism and art, irony and sincerity, mindless thrills and abstruse philosophizing. Market-driven, yet biting the hand that fed it, cyberpunk wanted everything and nothing simultaneously. By this measure, the short-lived, ground-breaking television show-cum-sociological phenomenon called *Max Headroom: 20 Minutes into the Future* (another unforgettable favorite being showcased this month in the United States on the Sci-Fi Series Collection) was the quintessence of cyberpunk. Neatly paralleling the print-media development of that particular narrative mode, *Max Headroom*, like the movie *Blade Runner* (1982), flourished in a synergistic feedback loop with text SF.

The show's creative roots extend back as far as 1981. At that time, Max's midwife, Peter Wagg, was directing the Creative Services Department of Chrysalis Records. Approached by England's Channel Four and asked to craft a showcase for the newly flourishing iconography of rock videos, Wagg conceived of an artificial host figure whose ultimate "ensilicement" would be the sleazy, witty, uncontrollable Max: digitized personality fragment of an investigative reporter. His conception now bigger than what Channel Four could sustain, Wagg managed to secure funding from HBO/Cinemax. Scripting the premiere British episode took until October 1984, just about the time that William Gibson's seminal cyberpunk novel *Neuromancer* appeared. Filming started up the following month, utilizing an abandoned gasworks as an atmospheric locale. Debuting in England to enthusiastic acclaim in early 1985, *Max Headroom* soon made the jump to American TV, transformed into a parody of the talk-show genre, where the virtual Max could interact with fleshly guests.

At this point, a real buzz began. Coca-cola signed Mac up as spokes-construct (his signature stutter added an unforgettable twist to Coke's "C-C-Caaatch the wavel"). Doonesbury cartoonist Gary Trudeau stole Max's unmistakable look and televised terrorist tactics to parody President Ronald Reagan. Tie-in products of all stripes appeared.

The next logical step was an ongoing series on one of the Big Three Networks, still the dominant dinosaurs of broadcast entertainment. NBC and CBS declined, leaving last-place ABC to pick up the challenge. With little to lose, ABC began to pump money into an avant-garde, self-deprecatory, cutting edge SF show with high production values.



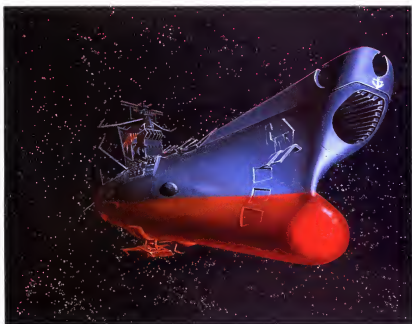
Actor Matt Frewer, before makeup or pixilation, considers his frenetic alter ego, *Max Headroom*.

The ABC version of *Max Headroom* was first telecast on March 31, 1987, in the ten o'clock timeslot. Carrying over the talented and irreplaceable Matt Frewer in his unique dual role as both human reporter Edison Carter and ether-roaming Max, and adding Amanda Pays as Carter's beautiful assistant Theora Jones, a scenario was fashioned that would allow for maximum action and satire. Each episode would find Carter, mini-camoting investigator for Network 123, hot on the trail of one or another conspiracy, scandal, or social crisis. Across a mere fourteen episodes, nearly every trope and plot MacGuffin favored by cyberpunk would be explored. Deadly "blipverts", addictive gameshows, organ theft, immortality by downloading, factory embryos — the range and density of the notions was impressive and typical of cyberpunk in general. Many of the scripts owe their sophistication to Michael Cassut, who has been writing SF for the magazines since 1974.

It was perhaps predictable that such a compressed, info-rich, sneering show, in which the futurist viewing populace were frequently portrayed as sheep, would not draw viewers by the requisite millions. In the short space of March to October 1987, *Max Headroom* flared brilliantly, lighting up the nation's living rooms with an acid glare. After its collapse, Matt Frewer went on to appear in such sitcoms as *Doctor, Doctor* (1989) and *Shaky Ground* (1992), but never recaptured his nationwide high profile — a profile memorably composed of thick, clay-like pseudoflesh the color of a bottled tan and hair like the aggressive wave of the future breaking over us all.

Paul Di Filippo

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Dear Editors:

I've already seen some negative comments about *Dark Skies*, but I wanted to say that I enjoy it and hope it succeeds. Unlike *The X-Files*, which selectively scatters its "myths" episodes among the killer-of-the-week stories, *Dark Skies* goes full bore with its main conspiracy every week. This may not get it the five years its creators want, but it's what I like the best about it.

Sincerely,
Les Leist

Dear Editor:

I saw *Star Trek: First Contact* only a few days after reading about it in the pages of your last issue, and I have just one thing to say — some days it seems that if not for the sci-fi press, the films I love wouldn't get any good press at all. I see that *The New York Times* and other mainstream newspapers slammed *First Contact*. This kind of biased reporting just makes me sick.

Why is it that the editors for the mainstream press always allow their reviews of sci-fi movies to be written by reviewers who never saw a sci-fi film they liked? These reviews never tell you anything worthwhile. It's like listening to someone with a chocolate allergy complain that he prefers vanilla.

Maybe from now on, we sci-fi fans should make an effort to write to the mass media every time its members attack the things we love. It might not work, but it would be worth a try.

Sincerely,
Harold Grossman

Dear Sir:

This is a very strong objection to your cover of October 1996. The 30th anniversary of *Star Trek* should have Kirk and Spock on the cover instead of Captain Janeway. I like her, but when *Voyager* has a 30th anniversary, then you can use her picture. You should have reversed the order of the picture sizes on the cover.

Sincerely,
Gloria Ainsworth

Dear Scott:

I have been reading *Science Fiction Age* for many years now, and have enjoyed it immensely. It's a whole different SF magazine than I have ever experienced. So congratulations on taking over *Sci-Fi Entertainment*. If you can keep it even half as good as your other magazine, I'll be a subscriber for life.

Good luck! And keep up the good work.

Sincerely,
Jerry Talbot

To Whom It May Concern:

My friend and I watch the Sci-Fi Channel quite a bit, and we see the advertisements for *Sci Fi Entertainment*. On the advertisements we also see Captain Janeway on the cover of one of the magazines.

We want to know why you'd have her on the magazine, and yet you do not play any *Star Treks* on the Sci-Fi Channel. We love all the *Star Treks* and are tortured every time we see that commercial.

Sincerely,
Carolyn Snowdon

We're sorry to leave you misty-eyed at times. The explanation is simply this. Here at Sci-Fi Entertainment, we try, in addition to covering the shows that appear on our own cable channel, to give fans total coverage of every aspect of sci-fi. It's a big sci-fi galaxy out there, and we want to be your behind-the-scenes guide to all of it.

Dear Mr. Edelman:

I read your article on *Mars Attacks!*, and I am anxiously awaiting the movie. I am one of the few of your readers old enough to remember the original cards themselves. I had a set of *Mars Attacks!* cards... but sadly, not for long.

After a series of odd nightmares in which I was being visited by those bubble-brained Martians, my mother convinced me that I should give them up. That I did, but I have regretted it ever since, and have luckily been able to reassemble as an adult a collection of those wonderfully bizarre cards. I look forward to finding out whether that madman Tim Burton can bring that zaniness to life.

Yours in sci-fi,
Sam Martinez

Dear Editor:

I've been reading your magazine since the beginning, the same way I have been watching the Sci-Fi Channel since the beginning. I just wanted to write to say I have no complaints. Since people who are happy so often stay quiet, and let the complainers rule the day, I thought I'd write to express a thumbs up of encouragement.

And oh, just one thing — keep running posters in your magazine. They're one of my favorite features.

Thanks,
Heather Matthews

We often cannot reply to our mail personally, but by all means write to Sci-Fi Entertainment, 441 Carlisle Drive, Herndon, VA 22070. E-mail has a better chance of receiving a reply; reach us at 75663.2701@compuserve.com. Be sure to visit the Dominion at <http://www.scifi.com>.

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